The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Service Spouse Series

METTE BEECROFT

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

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Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on Saturday, February 28, 1998. I am interviewing Mette Beecroft at my home for the AAFSW Oral History collection. Do you have anything in particular that you want to start with or talk about?

BEECROFT: No, in terms of beginning, you're an experienced interviewer and I'm perfectly happy to let you take the lead.

Q: I just have one observation. It isn't really a question. But I noticed that throughout your career that you have moved progressively between volunteer and paid positions and they always complement and dovetail and you just have moved forward throughout [your Foreign Service career].

BEECROFT: It's interesting you should say that because somewhere in my notes to myself this is a point that I wanted to make. And I've done this on purpose.

Q: Well, I think it's excellent.

BEECROFT: It's an example of the Foreign Service being flexible, that is to say transferable skills. I have done this on purpose to the point where I feel that I have a profession within the Foreign Service which has continued post by post.

Q: Well, you have had a profession. But I don't think it shows here [on the bio data sheet] because (reading) "Profession: French professor and Community Liaison Officer"...you've done so much more than that. So how would you, if you were doing a resume or applying for a position outside of the government, how would you characterize yourself?

BEECROFT: For outside it's almost public administration, if you will, because it's not a social worker. If I'm doing a resume, my resume falls into four categories, and one is program development, implementation, management. That is one set of skills. Another is public speaking, briefing, running meetings, all that kind of thing. Another is research, writing, and editing. The fourth category is management and administration.

Q: Speaking?

BEECROFT: But anyway, the point is four different categories of things.

Q: And you've done them all.

BEECROFT: And I've done them all. Yes. At one point or another. I'm pretty much the epitome of the fairly well rounded generalist, you know. But you need to be that.

Q: But that's enabled you... You had a Ph.D.

BEECROFT: I have a Ph.D. in French.

Q: And you came into the Foreign Service. Well, of course, a Ph.D. in French could be very helpful and it was very helpful.

BEECROFT: It was helpful linguistically, but it was also phenomenally helpful in terms of transferable skills. Because when you consider what you do to get a Ph.D. together, you do a lot of research and writing and editing which I've done in just about anything I've done in the past twenty years. And the public speaking: Any time you go into a classroom that's what you're doing. And not only public speaking, but leading groups, discussions and all of this kind of thing. You do this all the time. And sensitivity to group dynamics: Am I boring the class? Are they going to sleep? Do I have to change paces? You know, all of this kind of thing. So there are lots of things within the Ph.D. that transfer well.

Q: You had been in the Foreign Service about seven years when you became deputy director of FLO [the Family Liaison Office]. That was a lovely, high profile position to move into at that time, wasn't it? That must have helped throughout the years.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Because everybody knew who you were.

BEECROFT: Yes, that's true. That was superb timing, not quite good luck, because I did bring something into it. In a way I almost felt guilty about how much I loved it. I really enjoyed it. It was phenomenally rewarding. And I felt guilty because I discovered that I was much happier using my Ph.D. skills doing the kinds of things that I did in the FLO then and later in CLOs [Community Liaison Office]. I enjoyed it much more than I did being the ivory-tower-textbook-analysis sort of person, which I also can do. In fact, sometimes these academic skills have been very useful.

Q: How did you and Janet [Lloyd, first director] divide FLO?

BEECROFT: In the beginning, there were two of us and then we had our Three Musketeer stage when we added a secretary.

Q: Joan Scott?

BEECROFT: Joan Scott. A lovely lady and she knew a lot about getting things done in the Department [of State]. Janet and I knew the issues. Janet very early on said that I needed to function as her alter ego. And we really didn't divide things up tremendously much. From the very beginning it was perfectly clear that education was going to be a big thing, that employment was going to be an interest and divorces were where the support services first started. And so we did all of the counseling at that point. Obviously, we did not do it with the same degree of specialization as they do it now. We really just worked closely together. At that point, we never knew what was going to hit us because it was all so very new.

Q: Wonderful ground breaking opportunity!

BEECROFT: Oh, yes, it was phenomenal. So we really worked as alter ego. We really didn't divide things up other than that there were some things...Janet did not particularly like to talk to groups. I mean she could do it and everything she did she did with great elegance and competence. But I ended up being the one who did an awful lot of the public speaking, in the beginning, to quite hostile people.

I might add a few words about that. There were a number of things that we were really fighting against in the beginning, one of which was that the administrative cone of the Department had been more or less told by somebody, either on purpose to sabotage us or otherwise, that the only reason the FLO was necessary was that they were doing a poor job.

Q: That Administrative was all doing a poor job?

BEECROFT: Yes, that they were doing a bad job; therefore, we were necessary. Well, that was just...Either it was designed to give us a hard time...

Q: Machiavellian.

BEECROFT: Whatever the reasons, that is what had happened. And so I spent a good deal of time, certainly in the first year and a half, walking into what I felt was the lion's den to describe to people or to explain to people why FLO had become a necessity and that it certainly had nothing to do with Admin doing a bad job. And I used to joke and say, I'm not exactly saying that to know us is to love us, but nevertheless these were the reasons for FLO's establishment.

There were two other things which we really fought against. This was very much the women's liberation era and we had to make it very clear that we were not the strident, pushy, aggressive types and instead had to bend over absolutely backwards to be firm, but gentle, well-mannered, you know, really in the old Foreign Service sense, in order to be able to bridge this gap, to show people that we were quite civilized, but that we were nevertheless quite determined to do what we were doing. And people also had great doubts that we could exhibit professional standards and so we really had to prove ourselves at every turn, even answer phone calls more quickly, and do everything better than anybody else just to establish ourselves.

So we could very easily have failed, but we were both so convinced...

Q: Determined.

BEECROFT: Determined and convinced of the utility of the FLO mechanism that we hung in there.

Q: Well, and then I would think a little bit later on, too, when all those masses of evacuees starting coming in from the Middle East, I would think that the Department was delighted that somebody else was doing it.

BEECROFT: The first big evacuation that we received was from Islamabad, probably 1979. And there were four hundred people who came out, a lot of people at once. They all came to Washington, and many of them had really been traumatized because their safe haven had been fire-bombed and a number of them practically burned to death. So it was really horrible. And that was the beginning of real evacuation preparation. We persuaded Ben Reed, who was then the Undersecretary for Management, to keep the Department open all weekend, which they did. And we got all of the services that people needed in one place. There was a bus to take people back and forth from their hotels. Travel arranged for people to get tickets. Travel advances were available. Payroll was there. Everything was right there. The cafeteria stayed open. And so we really had everything all ready for them. We went out to the airport. We had diapers for people who had had a long, nasty trip with little kids. We made sure that there were malaria prophylactics in case anybody needed to take them.

Q: And how many of you did that?

BEECROFT: Oh, I don't remember how many.

Q: But you called in a lot of volunteers.

BEECROFT: We got in volunteers and then the Islamabad CLO opened up in the room which is now Judy Ikels's employment offices. We got in extra phones so that people could a) that they could stay in contact with each other, the evacuees, that their families could get into them, they could get to the post. You know, we just facilitated everything we possibly could. It was a major operation. Counseling and stress debriefings were available.

And in addition, I was dealing with the press because again, this waa first. I remember doing interviews with The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, Time Magazine, all wanting to know what was going on and what we were doing for these people, and we could tell them. I asked permission of the Director General, who was then Harry Barnes, if I might, in essence, speak for the Department. And he said yes.

Q: Great! A pretty hard act to follow, isn't it, as far as Foreign Service assignments are concerned? [laughter]

BEECROFT: You never should...What is the expression? The best way to wilt your laurels is to rest on them! But it was a fabulous time.

Q: It really must have been. And then you went to Bonn.

BEECROFT: And then we went to Bonn. By this time there were really only about fifteen, twenty, maybe, CLOs overseas, and they were still called FLOs. The name was changed because people understandably felt what do I do if I am not a family? Can I not use the FLO?

Q: Because in those days we really weren't thinking of the secretaries and security people as family.

BEECROFT: They were singles. We thought of them as people. Yes, but to have the name family, you had to be mommy, daddy, and the 1.9 average kids, or whatever. And so we changed the names.

Q: So that was a very wise selection.

BEECROFT: Just one more word. I was heavily involved in the CLO/FLO in Bonn, too. But what I also did at that point was really very interesting. From Bonn I traveled to Moscow, to Leningrad, to Warsaw, to Sofia, to London, to Brussels and Geneva, all explaining to people what the CLO was all about. Explaining to ambassadors what it could do for them. And in a sense that was the first CLO training in a very rudimentary way. I mean, now it's a wonderful program.

Q: Not so much CLO training as CLO consciousness-raising. Sensitivity training for the people who were in power.

BEECROFT: That's right. And, of course, there were a number of what I guess one could call "dinosaurs" who just couldn't understand any of this at all. And then one of the last things I did in Bonn was...Marilyn Holmes was by that time director of the FLO; and we put together the first regional conference of FLOs. We brought all of the Iron Curtain FLOs out, or CLOs out, so that we could all talk together. And I remember our admin. counselor, who was "agin" it all, but nevertheless he did let us do the conference. I think he was sure we weren't going to be serious about it. And he used to walk by the room where we were meeting - the door was open - walk by to see if we were still there. We were often there until six-thirty because there was so much that people wanted to talk about. And, of course, they were in Iron Curtain countries and that was also very stressful in and of itself.

Q: Yes. They had problems that the rest of us didn't have.

BEECROFT: That's right. And so that was another reason we started with this group. But anyway, that was the first FLO regional conference. Or first CLO regional conference.

Q: And that was?

BEECROFT: That was in 1982.

Q: Just four years after FLO opened.

BEECROFT: That's right.

Q: The CLOs got off the ground very quickly afterwards. And then Cairo.

BEECROFT: And then on to Cairo. That was a fabulously interesting post. Of course, Bonn was a very privileged place to be. We knew Europe already to some extent and we did a lot of traveling. And then, come Cairo. In some ways Cairo was a shock. We used to joke that in Bonn it rained all the time and everything worked. And in Cairo where it never rains nothing works. [laughter] It's gotten a little better now.

But this was then a post of about four thousand people, a lot of them AID contractors. The military was in the desert in large numbers.

Q: With spouses?

BEECROFT: No. They were single and actually didn't come to the embassy that much. And there were fourteen thousand Americans in Cairo. Well, there was somebody doing the CLO, so I couldn't just sail in because I knew something about it. I was a CLO summer substitute, however, several times. But the first thing that the Admin. Counselor asked me to do was to do the Fourth of July for the American community. This was an intimate little party for four thousand people! We brought food in from Dover, Delaware, and from Germany; and we brought the Sixth Fleet band from Naples. It was a large undertaking. And I can tell you one funny story about it if I may.

The rolls were coming in from Germany and the pilot - this was the Military Assistance Group, a MAG flight...

Q: Hot dog rolls.

BEECROFT: Hot dog rolls. That's correct. And hamburger. And the pilot gave the wrong signal in coming in, the wrong call sign, in other words. And the Egyptian army, being a little bit jumpy, sent fighter pilots out to bring down the plane [laughter] in another part of the airport. This was, mind you, in about 1982, '83. No, I beg your pardon: That would have been in 1984. And they told the pilot to come out. The pilot was a woman, but they would not speak to her. They would not speak to her. And so we had to get someone more senior to intervene. Actually, it was the general in charge of the Office of Military Cooperation, whose supply flight we were using. And he had to be the one to go down and sort the whole thing out.

Q: Isn't that amazing? So the hot dog and hamburger buns came in with an Egyptian fighter pilot? [laughter]

BEECROFT: Yes, that's right. That's right.

Q: Wonderful! [laughter]

BEECROFT: So that was a huge undertaking. And then I also did the emergency evacuation network, which was for fourteen thousand Americans. The network was absolutely moribund. And it was also a high-risk post. And so my job was to get it going. It was huge! Anything we did in Cairo was huge.

And then, and this I'm really very proud of because it's still alive, I played a major role in setting up a recreation center for the embassy. This was Nick Baskey again, who was a wonderful Admin. Counselor. You know, he just found a way to do things. And we took over one of the houses, the house which the economic counselor had had, and turned it into a recreation center. We spent a year talking about this. Some senior officials felt that felt that everybody should go out and meld with the community. Well, particularly for teenagers, you know, who couldn't wear shorts in the street and couldn't wear sleeveless things, there was just no location where they could be themselves. So a number of us felt that this was a very, very important thing to go for. And I finally ended up summarizing year-old discussions in about a three-page memo to Ambassador Veliotes, who then gave us the permission for it. But it was a long, long thing. I ended up supervising the construction of a swimming pool, where my main job was to make sure that the head construction person would not get drunk. One of these funny thing you end up doing. And it's still going today.

Q: Great. I wonder how many people we have there now.

BEECROFT: Oh, it's probably...I'm not sure.

Q: About the same thing.

BEECROFT: It's probably a little smaller. But at that point AID literally did not know who was there. When I went to them to try to find out who I should have on my emergency evacuation list, they didn't know. I think it's better now.

Q: How much of that was volunteer and how much was paid? You sort of went in and out, didn't you, whenever there was contract money or whatever? [laughter]

BEECROFT: This I have actually done by design. This is true. I have gone back and forth from volunteer to paid and sought out activities in both spheres which I felt complemented each other. In Cairo, the Fourth of July itself was not paid; it was a five-month, practically full time, job. But the Administrative Counselor felt bad about it and gave me a lovely whatever you want to call it. It was more than an honorarium, a good deal more: to do a complete handbook on doing the Fourth of July celebration because he felt that I had covered all bases.

Q: In other words, how to give a Fourth of July party.

BEECROFT: How to give a big Fourth of July party. In fact, not too long ago I talked with somebody who said that book is still used, which is nice to hear, too. Things change, but apparently there was still something useful in it.

The emergency evacuation network, the emergency network, was a paid job. A lot of the groundwork for setting up the center, the recreation center, was volunteer. I subsequently was hired to be the first manager. That was paid.

And then there was also the Cairo community service, which was run by two social workers. It was the local mental health institution, if you will. And there I did some volunteer work. We had been only a month in Cairo and the person who was supposed to be doing all of the orientation for newcomers somehow disappeared, was unable to do the work. And so after only a month they asked me to please come in and do orientation. And then I put my Ph.D. skills to work and treated it as a research project, and for that I was paid per presentation. I must have given about eight or nine of those while I was there.

But I have always sought to combine the two. And the fact that within the last four years, three years, actually, I've gotten four awards: Two of them have been for paid work and two of them have been for volunteer work.

Q: You're dual-track! [laughter] It's interesting to me. You came in in 1971, just before the 1972 directive; and so you weren't really affected by your attitude towards the Service. You see, I was right on the cusp. I was fifteen years before and fifteen years after [the directive].

BEECROFT: Yes. Right.

Q: And I saw many of my contemporaries just almost fold up and collapse because they had had their raison d'ï¿½tre for being in the Foreign Service pulled out from under them. And you didn't have any of that. With your volunteer work, did you ever...? It's inconceivable to me that you didn't run into some resentment from women who saw what you were doing. How did you handle that?

BEECROFT: Yes. Well, this was interesting. Absolutely. You're right on target. In cases like this I sort of presented myself as what I called "a hyphen" between the younger generation and the older generation. And what this consisted of was often explaining to the older generation why the younger generation felt like it did, and that it was not intended as a slap, or to negate all of the wonderful things they had done. I used to say this very consciously from my "pulpit" in the FLO in the early days, too, because I really felt very badly for people who had done such wonderful things and who somehow either felt or were made to feel that it was all worth nothing.

Q: A lot of that "being made to feel" was self-inflicted.

BEECROFT: Well, yes. By the same token, I used to explain to the younger generation why the older generation felt like it did.

And so this was the way I always saw myself. I went to Wellesley, which was, in many ways, a fairly traditional, well-bred young lady's school at one point, though it had much more than that. But I did really consider that I was a hyphen between the two generations.

Q: Bridging the gap.

BEECROFT: Bridging the gap. And that with my own background I could have gone either way, and I could see why people went one way or the other.

Q: Now, for instance, with this enormous Cairo Fourth of July endeavor, did you have volunteers? You were working as a volunteer. Did you have volunteer help from wives or from the admin. section?

BEECROFT: I had help from everybody in the world.

Q: Wonderful.

BEECROFT: I had something like fifty volunteers. And the other thing that I should say is that this was a job that really, in a sense, needed two people to do, and I worked with a friend who was the community contact and who knew businesses. And so we had businessmen. We had everybody. It was a wonderful effort really.

Q: How much of the Veliotes's attitude towards staff, how much did that have to do with this? I don't know them well, but they seem like very nice, very competent people.

BEECROFT: Oh, they were lovely. And Patty is a dear, Mrs. Veliotes. And then, of course it was the Athertons who were there before.

Q: Well, she's such a dynamo! [laughter]

BEECROFT: But I was entrusted with the whole thing. And Nick Baskey just said, Make it work! It's yours!

Q: Were you there with Betty Atherton, too?

BEECROFT: Yes, the Athertons were there first and then the Velioteses.

Q: I've always been interested in the brouhaha over Betty having an office in the embassy, which, from her point of view, was because it was just practical because it was impossible for her to get across town all the time.

BEECROFT: This is absolutely true! And I'll tell you a funny story that has to do with getting across, and not just getting across town but getting across the street! The first time I met Patty Veliotes, I knew who she was, but I was a stranger to her. I saw a small, blond lady trying to cross the street in front of the embassy. And this was really worth your life! And so finally, I said, Excuse me, Mrs. Veliotes, but should we go across the street together? [laughter] And I took her by the hand. This is absolutely true. And Betty also did a lot of her own work with invitations and much more. She saved a lot of people a lot of time. She's a very, very intelligent lady. She could give reasons which nobody could refute. And this left some people resentful because she was as smart as she was.

Q: Well, I also felt that she was one person in a position of authority whose husband had rank, and she didn't abuse it. She put it to constructive help for families.

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: And I just could not understand some of the resentment.

BEECROFT: Well, for example, she wanted...I think some of the resentment may have stemmed from that whole business of her wanting to get a security clearance so that she could attend all the briefings which her husband attended. And I can very much understand her wanting to do that. And I think now you probably would.

Q: I think she probably could.

BEECROFT: But she was probably the first one who ever wanted to do that and really insisted.

Q: And did she get it?

BEECROFT: And she did get it!

Q: Good for her!

BEECROFT: Good for her to get it. But again, there were some of the old fogies who just couldn't understand this. There were sort of antiquated reasons, if you will, for the brouhaha.

Q: But she kept it anyway. She kept the office.

BEECROFT: Yes, she kept it.

Q: Good for her.

BEECROFT: There was one horrible time when, if she had been in that office, she would have been killed because there was a leaking toilet on the second floor, way, way up, and it loosened the ceiling above her desk. One day she came in and there was a huge chunk of concrete - because building was kind of hit or miss - on her desk.

Q: I hadn't heard that.

BEECROFT: Yes, I saw it with my own eyes. And if that had fallen while she was at her desk, she would have been killed.

Q: I notice it was Cairo, too, that you mention the temples of something.

BEECROFT: Well, we traveled a lot. We have seen so many wonderful things. (Egypt was, in many ways, very, very stressful because so many things didn't work and it was so dirty and so much noise and it was so difficult to get places. And sometimes, because the phones didn't work, you really had to go there and find the people and hope they were there. Or you used radios.)

In any case, one of the wonderful things about it was all of the things we saw. When you put together Pharaonic history, Islamic history, and Coptic history, it just doesn't stop. It's all there. And we took some wonderful cruises on the Nile in a funny little boat. It was not a ship; it was a boat, which I've always described as a first cousin of the African Queen because it was a funny little thing. But it was flat-bottomed and it could go up on the mud flats where the big river boats could not go. So we went to all kinds of places. We went to middle Egypt where people can't even go now because it's such a hotbed of fundamentalism. Seeing all of the temples along the Nile: Edfu, Esna, and Kom-Ombo. And then down to Abu Simbel. Of course, the Valley of the Kings. Aswan. Of course, Aswan is the dam. Lots of very interesting things. Of course, in Cairo you have the pyramids at Giza, which are incredible; and Saqqarah, the step pyramid, which is probably the oldest of them all. There is just no end to the local, the historical, and the cultural interest.

Q: And you were there at a time, as you said, when you could do this.

BEECROFT: You could still do it. Yes. We had some close calls with security, one time, in particular, when they stopped a truckload full of bombs which was to be parked right beside the embassy. And they stopped all traffic in the middle of Cairo, if you can imagine that. It was just unbelievable. They also caught the truck. In fact, one of our problems was to get people to take security seriously. The sky was blue and the palm trees were lovely and there were some beautiful gardens, and what could be wrong? There was the potential for this. But, in any case, many wonderful things to see and we could go and see.

Q: I've always thought it would be a stressful, but fascinating post.

BEECROFT: Yes, it was both.

Q: And then you went from there to Ouaga[dougou]. [laughter]

BEECROFT: Yes, and this was another world. A wonderful post in a very different way. Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world, yet people were wonderfully hospitable and welcoming, and you never, never felt... We tried to live quietly and modestly and no wretched excess of anything, but you never had the feeling that people had it in for you because we obviously had more than they did.

Q: I always felt, when we were in Sierra Leone, the reason was because the gulf was so huge that they could never aspire.

BEECROFT: They couldn't comprehend it.

Q: Right. Which was to our advantage.

BEECROFT: There were certainly times which in the United States if you had been the only white person in a group of two or three hundred blacks, somebody would have made you feel uncomfortable. But I have been on planes out of Ouaga, on Air Afrique, where I was the only white. Or Pamela, my daughter, and I went down into the market. Same thing. You never were made to feel uncomfortable.

Q: In the late 80s or 90s.

BEECROFT: Yes, that would have been '88 to '91. You never were made to feel unwelcome.

Q: Because we were in Freetown from '62 to '65, so that was quite a bit before that. And I felt exactly the same way: no fear. No fear.

BEECROFT: No, none whatsoever. That was certainly something that I appreciated very much. In fact, Burkinabe who went to the United States - we sent people on Leader grants - would come back to us and say, "What is wrong with American blacks?" What they picked up from many people was a sort of a chip-on-shoulder resentment. They picked it up right away. The Burkinabe asked, "What is wrong with them?" I always found this very interesting.

Q: Did any American blacks come to Ouagadougou?

BEECROFT: Yes, they did.

Q: Because we had that in Freetown, too, and they were not as accepted as they thought they might be. Of course, that was in the 60s, the early civil rights days.

BEECROFT: They also had expected to feel right at home right away. We were visiting friends in Benin, in Cotonou. And there, up in the jungle, was a jungle kingdom which lasted for about 300 years.

Q: Oh, yes. With all the bronzes.

BEECROFT: Yes, that's right. And which was native African and where they had and sold other native Africans as slaves. The wife of our ambassador in Cotonou was receiving a group of Baptists, a clergyman and some members of the congregation, and was explaining this. And they got furious with her: No, no, no! This can't be! This would never have happened!

Q: The Guineans or the Americans?

BEECROFT: The Americans. They would not believe that it was so. They with her for even daring to say that any blacks would enslave other blacks.

Q: Of course they did. They brought them to the coast... Many of the blacks who were sent over to Brazil came from what was then Dahomey where they had been captured by interior tribes and brought down to the coast.

BEECROFT: Exactly. In any case, we were never afraid in Ouagadougou. We were never made to feel unwelcome. And it was really a lovely three years.

Q: To go from this tremendous situation in Cairo, all the people, the confusion and everything, and suddenly to be in Ouagadougou, which could not have been a very large embassy...

BEECROFT: Well, no. Actually, we were in the United States in between and then came out to Ouaga.

Q: Oh, you were. Well, I don't have that here. So there was a Washington assignment.

BEECROFT: There was a Washington assignment between.

Q: Oh, yes. I see now: '85 to '88.

BEECROFT: So there was a Washington assignment. I think one of the things, of course, in a place like Ouaga there is almost "nothing" to do; so whatever you enjoy is self-generated. Now for some people this is absolutely poisonous. For me it was not.

Q: Wonderful opportunity!

BEECROFT: Wonderful opportunities, and in many ways I think I led the most balanced life I've led anywhere because I worked full time. I did a lot of volunteer work, too, but I was the Management Officer for AID, which was another different experience and very interesting. But at the same time I played loads of tennis and I read and wrote letters and did some sewing if I needed to. And it was lovely.

Q: Was that a full time job for AID?

BEECROFT: Very full time. In fact, there had not been a management officer for several years. There was a competitive process and particularly, since Bob was DCM, we had to be able to document exactly how I was selected. There was no real job description. I very soon realized that I was on my own to figure out the job. And so I taught myself a lot about contracting and some other highly technical aspects of the job. But I thoroughly enjoyed it. But it was very full time.

Q: And the trips. I always think the trips through the Dogon country must have been...

BEECROFT: The trips that we did...Again, this was a very different type of traveling, and we very often asked Bob's driver - I mean, he'd be paid, this was not for free - if he would come with us because he spoke several of the tribal languages. And we would then rent one of the embassy four-by-fours so we always had some security which was always a good idea. The Dogon country is isolated; it is beautiful. It's hard to imagine that you walk into a world which is really almost beyond comprehension it's so different and so very primitive. The people in the Dogon country in Mali took to the hills about three hundred years ago because they did not want to be proselytized by Muslims. They have a six-day week. They still, once a month, segregate their women in little houses away from everybody else. It's another world. They have some very beautiful carving. They have now learned that they can raise onions. They have a very good kind of onion from which they are actually able to earn a decent amount of money. So they have a salable item up there.

Q: And they truck them in?

BEECROFT: And then they truck them in. Some of the people who are up there have never left. A young man who was our guide, who spoke good French, had never left even to go down to the coast or anything. But it was fabulous. And then we also were able to drive to...We traveled within Burkina as well and to their small, by Kenya standards, game parks. But Burkina has the largest herd of elephants in West Africa. In fact, one of the things that my husband was able to do was to get a good grant of money because the Canadians were, as it were, belling the cats. They were tracking the elephants to see where they were migrating and Bob managed to get a certain amount of money that we could contribute to this effort also.

So we traveled to the game parks, but we also were able to visit friends in Benin, which has always been thought of as the source of the brains of West Africa. One vignette ticks with me to this day.

At the ambassador's residence there was a gate guard. And one time we walked in and the gate guard was reading a book! Our hostess asked, What are you reading? It turned out that he was reading Rousseau, the eighteenth-century French author. And he said to our hostess, Madame, vous savez, il faut se cultiver. Madame, you know, one must school oneself, improve oneself. There was a gate guard sitting there reading Rousseau, which is something usually only doctoral candidates in eighteenth-century French literature read. Anyway, Benin has always been thought of as being the brains of West Africa. And so we really enjoyed our...We actually made two trips there. We were able to drive to Ghana and also to the Cote d'Ivoire and to Togo, which is a beautiful country, kind of long and thin and it has tremendous variety of things. For a lot of this our kids were able to come along, too. We tried to schedule these trips when they would be there. It was wonderful. We saw a lot.

Q: I felt, too, that West Africa was quite an experience. I'm glad I did it when I did. [laughter] I wouldn't like to do it now.

BEECROFT: It's funny. When we said that we were going to West Africa, people said, Oh, my goodness! Why would you do that? And I honestly felt, when I was there, that I was really in the Foreign Service. I'm very glad we went. Very glad.

Q: We often say if we hadn't been to Freetown, what would we talk about? [laughter] So there again, another change from... (End of tape)

BEECROFT: ...We knew Brussels from before.

Q: When you were in Paris.

BEECROFT: And both my husband and I speak fluent French, so we just sort of sailed right in. We were lucky enough to have a wonderful house with a wonderful location where we could go out of the drive or use the metro. And Bob had a most interesting job. He was at NATO at that point. In fact, that was kind of funny. That was just as the Soviet Union was falling apart, and his very first day on the job he walked into the office and they said, You are [in] charge. And so there he was, you know, everything going on. He said that was a bit of a baptism by fire.

For the first year I was there, not even quite that long, I volunteered in the CLO. CLO there has a potential of about two thousand clients. It is a very big and complicated post and office because there are three ambassadors, or three missions and three ambassadors: the bilateral embassy, the U.S. Mission to NATO, and then the US Mission to the European Union. So it is a complicated post, and there are lots of military as well. After my volunteer work in the CLO, I could see that nobody had looked at anything in the files for years! In fact, I found papers from the previous time that I had visited the CLO, which I mentioned when I was coming out of Bonn in '82 or something like that. They were still there. So I thought I'd better do something.

Q: It was almost ten years ago.

BEECROFT: That's right. Ten years. You know what it's like to look at something you wrote much earlier. It's not always particularly soothing. But in any case, there it was. So I first worked on redoing the files. From the files I went on to do the Community Liaison Office there, which was really one of the best experiences I've ever had. I had a wonderful person to work with. We had a really hard time in the beginning because for some reason there had been someone in CLO before who had alienated about seventy-five percent of the community. I don't know how, perhaps by a very uneven temperament, sometimes lovely and sometimes very unpleasant. But we worked against that and turned things around and had two and a half wonderful years. When I left, Lynn Yarbro received a meritorious honor award. I received a superior honor award. I think I'm the only CLO who's ever received this overseas. And, in addition, I received an award from the Department of the Army. We worked very hard, fifty hours a week.

Q: But you were recognized.

BEECROFT: We didn't know that until the end. But still. I appreciated those two awards very, very much. But those were awards for paid employment, if you will, as opposed to volunteer. In any case, Brussels was lovely.

Q: And being in Europe, too.

BEECROFT: And being in Europe. We could return to all of our old haunts because, again, Europe had been our "backyard" for a long while and Bob and I had both been in Paris as students. So we could go to Paris and we could go to London and we could just do the things you usually do when you're in Europe. Just a hop, skip, and a jump from the Dutch tulip gardens. And we could go to Amsterdam. It was just a wonderful spot. Bruges! One of the best places in the world!

Q: And then to Jordan.

BEECROFT: And then on to Jordan. It was our first time in the Middle East. In a way Egypt prepares one for Jordan, and we certainly knew quite a bit about the Islamic culture and some of the constraints that it imposes on one. But the Jordanians have the reputation for being the most hospitable people in the Middle East, and they almost killed us with kindness. I referred to Jordan as a "fat post" because we were invited out so much.

Q: I'm sure the meals were sumptuous.

BEECROFT: And the meals were sumptuous, and, of course, the Middle Eastern tradition is that if you can see one iota of the table covering or the table, this is wrong. Just loaded with food! Ten to twelve different kinds of dessert! It was all quite overwhelming. But they couldn't have been more hospitable. And there is so much to see in Jordan. You could spend weeks just on Petra by itself. Or Wadi Rum, which is maybe less well known, but is a huge canyon and desert located to the south, north of Petra, but to the south of Amman, which is just the wildest, most beautiful terrain you could ever want to see. And this opens into Saudi Arabia. There is no boundary or anything. It just goes. There's a lot of drug trafficking. This is where Lawrence of Arabia gathered troops and camped. The relatives of the Bedouins, the same tribes, are still there, and they're all very much aware of this heritage. There was a cave where Lawrence of Arabia used to repair if he wanted to gather his forces. He had a mystical fascination with Wadi Rum. A beautiful, beautiful spot. And then up north of Amman is Jerash, which is a Roman city in wonderful repair, which is also being dug out. The Jordanians are little by little beginning to realize what they have archaeologically. There is a wonderful organization called, ACOR, the American Center for Oriental Research, which is a wonderful group of people who are working on the mosaics - the mosaics in Jordan are fantastic! - and on all sorts of archaeological reconstruction and research. It's a wonderful, wonderful place. They are working on something called the Petra scrolls, which, after the Dead Sea scrolls, are one of the most sensational archaeological finds that anybody has made in a long while. It's real estate records and marriage records and all kinds of things which tell you a lot about the everyday life of the people.

So there was Petra, and lots of interesting things right within Amman. That was a great part of our life. We enjoyed traveling around. Then we got to Damascus, which is fabulous. The big temple in Damascus is a mosque, but within the mosque is an old Roman temple. And so there are two eras superimposed on one another. And Damascus has so many beautiful small details. You do have to be able to put aside some of the dirt and the decrepitude to look at the small details. But, for instance, doorways in Damascus are just fantastic. In fact, our kids went around with cameras taking pictures of them.

And then, of course, we went off to Israel and Jerusalem and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and all of the things there are to see in Jerusalem. Finally, now, in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher they have reached agreement. It's ironic, but for years all the Christian denominations which are interested have been fighting about who had jurisdiction over what, with the result that there was one chapel that had had a fire which remained burned out and black for fifteen years because they could not stop fighting about whose it was. And now they have finally gotten all of that together.

But there is so much. There is Jerusalem, which is wonderful. There's Tel Aviv and Bethlehem.

And also, getting back to Amman, I think one of the most memorable experiences in Amman is Christmas Eve on Mount Nebu. Mount Nebu on Christmas Eve was absolutely incredible! This is the spot from which Moses first viewed the Holy Land, though he never got there himself. So Christmas Eve on Mount Nebu is very special. Both times it was a clear night and we could see the lights of Bethlehem.

Q: Oh, how moving!

BEECROFT: Very moving. By the same token, we also went there with a Jewish family, and - I even get sort of teary when I think about it - the son got out the Old Testament and began to read from Deuteronomy. It was just incredible.

Q: Well, see, those were the Foreign Service experiences that just have made our lives so special.

BEECROFT: So very rich.

Q: And I think that compensates or compensated for the lack of things that we would have been able to do at home.

BEECROFT: Absolutely. That we were doing such different things. If I may just, while we're on the subject of doing some very different things, this goes back to Amman. Three weeks after we arrived, His Majesty, King Hussein, announced that they would sign a peace treaty with Israel; so we had three weeks to prepare for President Clinton and nine hundred of his closest friends. [laughter] Well, you could imagine what it was like. The peace treaty was to be signed in Wadi Araba, which is to the south of Aqaba, but the President was also, President Clinton was also addressing parliament. So to put this all together was an incredible task. As DCM, Bob was control officer for the entire operation and we split our efforts between Amman and Aqaba. I remember one time finding myself with Bob on a plane with sixty-five sheiks, all in their flowing robes. Just a wonderful picture, with memory. But I think probably the most memorable thing about all of this was the euphoria that people felt. I can remember, for instance, the Israeli and the Jordanian troops, who previously had only thought about fighting each other, doing a jam session on "As the Saints Go Marching In." [laughter] That was the only thing they could find that they both could play. And I remember the ambassador's driver, who was a Palestinian, going around with a big smile on his face and saying, I can't believe this! I can't believe this! So it was a wonderful, wonderful moment, made somewhat bittersweet, I must admit, by subsequent developments which have not been as happy. But this was one of the times when I really felt that I was in the Foreign Service.

Also I can remember the signing of the peace treaty, standing on the red carpet with much television and radio coverage, President Clinton, Mrs. Clinton, King Hussein, and greeting Queen Noor. It was all very exciting.

The other thing of almost the same magnitude was the so-called MENA conference, the Middle East and North African economic conference, which was really one of the last things that the late Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown, engaged in. This was a huge effort to begin to open up Israeli and Arab countries to joint economic ventures, to begin to get people to talk and to start thinking about investing money. And I volunteered on this. Actually I was working full time then, too. Somehow I also managed to volunteer. We were opening, we, the embassy, what was called the American Business Center, where we had everything online so people could look up things about businesses, they could look up about what American businesses were in town, where they were staying. And it was a roaring success. In fact, none other than Arafat came. [laughter] It was funny. My husband was there also, and I said, Bob, don't look now but I think that's Arafat coming. And it was! And he was just enthralled by the technology and said, Can I have some of these?

Again, there was lots of promise and it has not played out as well as we had hoped that it would. But it nevertheless was a good beginning and quite an undertaking.

Q: I notice in this thing that you wrote about Amman that you were selected by the post employment committee and the ambassador to do the CLO. Now who wouldn't let you do it? The Department because your husband was DCM?

BEECROFT: Actually, yes. It was a sad time. It was a very sad time. I had just come from doing a pretty good job in Brussels and I had received two big awards. And it was basically the FLO that said no.

Q: And why?

BEECROFT: Because, they said, people would be afraid to talk with me.

Q: But why?

BEECROFT: Because I was the DCM's spouse. Of course, the post had already selected me because they wanted me. But it was a very sad time, and it created an enormous amount of upheaval at Post. But in the final analysis, I care more about the FLO and the CLO as an institution than I did about remaining at war with anybody. And so now we cooperate again. But it was a sad time.

Q: I won't ask who was in charge of FLO then; I could look it up.

BEECROFT: I would prefer to just let it go.

Q: So you found a job on the economy in Amman for a large AID water project...

BEECROFT: Yes, this was fascinating.

Q: ...working in the Jordanian Ministry.

BEECROFT: I was working in the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation. Honestly, my job itself was not that interesting, but I guess to be intellectually curious about your surroundings goes with the Foreign Service. And what this showed me about the way Jordan works and the importance of tribes and "WASTA," an institutionalized form of favoritism which is not considered dishonest. It's just the way things get done. And this happens in many parts of the world.

Q: If you're my cousin, that's even that much better. [laughter]

BEECROFT: Oh, yes. That's right. And so you build up a bank of things that are owed you and then you collect on it, and that's the way life is. And so, just to be in that medium, I also had an enormous sympathy for the way quite well trained people were scrimping along on very, very low wages. In fact, I don't know how they did it. And they still remained very nice. I also ran across the phenomenon, which I saw in Egypt, too, where people who come from "good families," or fairly well-to-do families, have sons who don't do anything at all except live on their parents' income. They don't feel badly about it and they really consider that they are superior to the rest of the world.

Q: I think much of the developing world is that way.

BEECROFT: I came face to face with this all the time within the Ministry. So it was a very interesting experience in the way Jordan really worked.

Q: And probably much of the Middle East. [laughter]

BEECROFT: When there was a change of cabinet while we were in Jordan and the Prime Minister was supposed to restructure some of the ministries, I just didn't see how he could possibly do this. The way they do things is just too deeply ingrained everywhere. But it was a fascinating job for what I learned, maybe less for what I did. I was also able to function as a personnel officer and go to bat for my people, because I managed a number of contracts, to see if I could get them higher pay.

Q: I think this is a little interesting window into a post - and also speaks highly of you, too - that after being denied the CLO job, you then went and mentored the person who got the job and also helped the ambassador's wife where the CLO couldn't. [laughter]

BEECROFT: Again, I decided what could be worse for the post than to have the ambassador, the DCM's spouse, and the CLO at war! Furthermore, she was a friend before this business started. A bright, bright person, but foreign-born, one year in the Foreign Service, and no CLO experience. Don't ask. Don't ask. And so I simply said to her, You know, we've been friends before. You know me. I'm not Mrs. DCM. I'm me. I am more than willing to help you all I can. You know you can tell me to go away if you want. Will you promise me that you will tell me to go away if I get in your way, because I have no supervisory authority over you whatsoever. And we worked very, very closely the whole time. I was really her all-purpose volunteer and consultant and mentor. We didn't break confidentiality, which is very important, but nevertheless I was deeply involved with much of what she did. She left post very unexpectedly because her husband was reassigned; and when she left, she publicly thanked me; so I obviously did not get in her way. She left just at the beginning of summer, which is not when people want to start being CLO. They finally got two people together to do the job. One left post because she was expecting a child; and the other co-CLO stayed behind. Then she, on an emergency, had to leave post also. People were streaming in. So I volunteered in CLO for three months, just about. The admin. counselor wanted very badly to pay me. He was going to. Life was so busy that we got into the next fiscal year, and we can't pay somebody with money from the former budget for activities performed and so I never was paid. He was mortified. But I'd do the same thing all over again, At a post like Amman you've got some people coming who have never been overseas before and who couldn't [adjust to the environment]. So there the old volunteer spirit came in and I used my professional knowledge to do volunteer work again.

Q: And who was the ambassador?

BEECROFT: Wes Egan.

Q: And so the CLO really didn't feel threatened by you working with Mrs. Egan?

BEECROFT: No.

Q: That's wonderful.

BEECROFT: No, because I mean we all talked with each other. Marian, the CLO who took over when I couldn't do the job, was an attorney and a very capable person. And so we all worked together on a lot of things. I felt there was never any problem.

Q: This is all speaking very highly of your willingness to take the knocks and go along with it.

BEECROFT: Again, if you look at it...I must admit that certainly there was part of me that felt if they won't have me, I'm going to go away! But it wasn't the post that turned me down; it was Washington. And I didn't want to have a DCM spouse on the warpath. That's not going to help anyone. And furthermore, I feel for any ambassador's spouse. This can be a pretty lonely position. She needs somebody to whom she can turn, and I was the logical suspect. There was also another reason to get involved in things at post, and that is - I think this gets around to the role of the DCM spouse - I think that the DCM spouse usually works best is she is a chief cheerleader along with the ambassador's wife. Now my personality was more outgoing, if you will, than the ambassador's wife's. But to take a strong cheerleading role seemed perfectly natural to me, which I did.

Q: I would think that the DCM position could be very difficult. The DCM spouse position could be difficult.

BEECROFT: It could be difficult, I guess, if you let it. And also it could be difficult if you have a difficult ambassador's wife. But there was never any difficulty at all, and Virginia was a good friend. But one of the reasons - I was always very deeply involved in post things - but if you yourself really work at the post you show that you are there to serve the post and not to be served by it. And if you have established this, then, if you do need help, you get it, in droves. I did two Fourth of Julys there: one for a thousand people and one for just four or five hundred. Actually it would be about six hundred. And I had all the help that I could use. I did it one year, and the next year the same committee came back and we plowed ahead again.

Q: So in that sense the old Foreign Service is still with us, because people always used to say to me, Well, what else would you be doing at post? [laughter] Well, this was in the old days. [laughter]

BEECROFT: Posts are funny places now.

Q: Oh, they are! I'm sure!

BEECROFT: Posts are funny places, and I must admit that posts still work best if there is some element of the old Foreign Service in it, if there are some people who are willing to do volunteer work and to get in there and do things. Now, I always used to say, used to say - I wouldn't say it so much any more because things have changed at home - that I sometimes noticed...There was one post where I noticed that people were less willing to volunteer than they would have been under normal circumstances at home, in the U. S. This always puzzled me a bit. But of course, now it's getting harder and harder to find volunteers for anything. And just talking specifically about the AAFSW brings me to an observation which I think is correct that... We were talking a while ago about the fact that people now come into the Foreign Service without the intent of making it a career. They have the intent of staying around five years and getting out of it what they can get! It's not what they can bring to it, but what they can get. And then they leave. People who feel this way don't take a great interest in the institution and what they can do to make it a better place. Therefore, it's harder to find volunteers to do things.

However, in Amman we had a good mixture of people working and people volunteering and people doing both; so it was a wonderful two years.

Q: Do you think that maybe the volunteer outreach and community service is not as prevalent among young people who are coming into the Service now as it was?

BEECROFT: Very definitely. Part of it is because it's a more self-centered group, I'm afraid. When we came into the Foreign Service, well, we still considered it a career, both of us, husband and wife. You also came with the idea you would be loyal and committed. And I think this sense of loyalty and commitment carried you through some of the more difficult times without complaining. You just got on with it.

Q: The next post could be better.

BEECROFT: The next post could be better.

Q: And this wasn't going to last forever. [laughter]

BEECROFT: And it just wasn't in the culture to complain. But there's a lot more complaining going on now because people don't look at it in the same way. There have been times when I have thought to myself, Lady, you should have stayed in Virginia! I never said it, but I quietly thought it to myself. I happened to notice something in the newspaper just a couple of days ago which talked about the baby boomers' "culture of complaint," and I thought, Yup! I've seen it.

Q: Been there, done that. [laughter]

BEECROFT: Been there, heard that! [laughter]

Q: We don't get The Foreign Service Journal because Guido broke ranks with AFSA when he felt it wasn't contributing to his retirement in any way. So I picked up a copy of the Journal the last time I was at DACOR, and Karen Krebsbach, the feminist editor who was just leaving, had a one-page farewell in which she expressed genuine concern about the direction that the Journal was taking. She had been criticized by her board for occasionally printing articles that took a critical look at the Service, and it seems the board wanted to revert to a bland, all positive editorial policy. Now, is that the mentality at State that expect people to look at the FS as a long-time career, or is that an aberration? She was rather a feminist and reached out in directions that perhaps not every editor would. I was very fond of her because she published everything I sent to her! [laughter] But now with some fear and trepidation I'll march down with my new article to the new editor and see how that's [received].

Anyway, getting back to the desire now on the part of the Foreign Service to make it a career institution, what are the chances? If they really are sincere about that, this is the big moment for spouses to move ahead, if you have people there who realize that the spouse component is going to be very, very important. It'll make or break that attitude or that plan!

BEECROFT: Well, the new Director General and the undersecretary for Management, they, in a sense, have not been in office long enough for...I really don't know how critical you can be at this point.

Q: Who are they, the two?

BEECROFT: Okay. The new Director General is Skip Gnehm, ambassador Gnehm; and the undersecretary for Management is Bonnie Cohen, who used to be - she's a political appointee - she used to be at Interior, and who has assumed that position. Very bright and, I think, very effective, but absolutely no particular experience with the Foreign Service. I don't know to what degree one can be critical.

Q: Can evaluate what they're doing.

BEECROFT: Yes, that's right. It's too early. But I think that there are... First of all, the whole idea that, okay, the Foreign Service is a career. And when you have a whole generation of people who are used to jumping from job to job, be it the Foreign Service or any other job, I'm not quite sure how you turn this off and make them want to stay there. The younger generation, unfortunately, they see what is happening, or has happened, to some of the older generation in the selection-out process; and they look at it and think, I don't want to stick around and be treated like that!

Q: Was this a massive purge, if you will, recently? I mean, I haven't kept up.

BEECROFT: No. What this has been is the so-called top-heavy service and TIC-ing out - TIC referring to time in class. For example, you have, say, seven years to go from becoming an FSO-1 to moving into the Senior Foreign Service. And then you have another seven years to make it from FEOC counselor to minister-counselor, which is the second grade of the Senior Foreign Service, the SFS. And so that a number of people have been selected out just as they were ready to go into the Senior Foreign Service. And we have lost some phenomenally good people. I heard about somebody the other day with whom my husband had worked, actually, who was incredibly knowledgeable and incredibly good, and he was selected out.

Q: And I would think at that age - he has children in college.

BEECROFT: Fortunately, that's the only good thing, that he is not married, so he did not have those concerns.

Q: But what a thing to do to someone at that point in their life.

BEECROFT: Yes. The Foreign Service is losing so much, so awfully much! And, of course, as you say, for somebody who is just at the point where you have kids in college, it's deadly! It's absolutely deadly. And this is not lost on the younger generation.

Q: Anybody who gets to that level anyway has done a good job as a Foreign Service Officer or wouldn't be there. So they either should take in fewer people or weed them out earlier or something, and not let them bunch up at the top because they're all good.

BEECROFT: They're all good.

Q: I mean, they have to be to get there. In one aspect of diplomacy or another they have to be good to get that far.

BEECROFT: I think also that you ought to be able to get to the Senior Foreign Service by doing an all-around good job. Now, my husband finally went from counselor to minister-counselor, the next phase. I was delighted for him, because he certainly deserved it; he's worked hard. But he literally...I think if he had not gone to Sarajevo with me back here and gotten shot at, as it were, with bodyguards and danger pay and the whole business, I don't think that he would have been promoted either. And I think it is wrong that you have to go to such extremes to be recognized. I mean, I'm glad for him, but it really bothers me that you can't be recognized unless you've done something really extreme.

Q: And so now he will stay in...

BEECROFT: He has another seven years if he so decides. And I'm really not sure at this point what we're going to do. But in terms of the way the Foreign Service is moving, overseas there are about three hundred Foreign Service positions which are vacant because...

Q: Mid-level?

BEECROFT: Mid-level. We've gone through this thing of cutting, cutting, cutting, cutting. You've probably been following...The budget has been slashed and slashed. I think that maybe that has finally turned around. The motto overseas was: Do more with less. Do more with less. Well, there comes a certain point when you cannot, with the best of will, do more with less. And people are really getting sick of hearing it. And I think Bonnie Cohen, the new Undersecretary for Management, understood this. So they are now increasing their intake in a huge way. So promotions from the younger to the middle grade are going to be much easier. But there also is going to be a huge gap of expertise at the top and I don't know how they're going to handle it.

Q: That's something you can't just pluck someone in to fill because there is no substitute for experience.

BEECROFT: There is no substitute for experience. And, of course, this, in a way...One of the problems that you have is that in this White House there has been a great deal of...You know, it was a very young White House and, as people sometimes joked, they need some adult supervision over there!

Q: Oh, I've often said that.

BEECROFT: But certainly youthful determination and energy and tremendous intelligence is fine, but there has been a lack of understanding of the roles of wisdom, seasoning...

Q: Experience. A few gray hairs.

BEECROFT: And a few gray hairs! Yes. So that I'm afraid we're going to find ourselves with a great gap at the top. Now this might be a place for the reduced middle grades to move into, but you're going to find an imbalance. So whether you can take all of this and turn it into a career I'm not quite sure.

Q: And what would the role of the spouse be, assuming that she has a salary or there's a tremendous increase in the salary of the officer to compensate for the fact that she cannot have a vertical career of her own.

BEECROFT: A vertical, a traditional career progression. Well, I'll tell you. I think it is probably really pretty much impossible for the Foreign Service to provide this, assuming that you don't have a tandem couple. I can remember years ago, twenty years ago to be exact, I once marched myself over to the Board of Examiners - this was from the FLO - and said, Gentlemen! You have got to be more honest about what is involved for the spouse in this! And one man said to me, Oh, but then we might scare them away! [laughter] This is twenty years ago, and I'm sure this man is long gone, and a good thing, too!

Q: And he was right! [laughter]

BEECROFT: But think of the horror of getting these people into the Foreign Service, luring them in, before they've really understood what was involved!

Q: The women. Understanding what's happening to them.

BEECROFT: I think you will never be able to satisfy the needs of someone who wants to be a lawyer or a doctor...

Q: ...or an architect.

BEECROFT: ...or an architect. You'd just better not do it. I think also that there will probably never be enough jobs overseas. I just don't think there will be. I think what we have to do is to provide as many alternative programs as possible. And I think there's been a tremendous improvement! It's never going to be perfect. But there's been a tremendous improvement. For instance, the FLO right now is about to announce a so-called "family member appointments," which will mean that if you can get one of these PIT position - part time and temporary, which is paid for by appropriated fund - you will also get some retirement credits. I don't know all the details yet, but it is well in the works. I mean this is something we've been working on...

Q: Oh, for years!

BEECROFT: Since we started!

Q: It's not the answer for everyone, but it's an obvious solution that should have universal appeal.

BEECROFT: Yes, it should. This is true. Absolutely.

Q: If you can't be an architect, at least you can work for some sort of retirement benefits in an underemployed position and take the Foreign Service as the exciting thing that it can be.

BEECROFT: Yes. You just have to be brutally frank with people from the beginning.

Q: I would think so.

BEECROFT: Because otherwise, what it does to human lives or to families. You get people into this and all of the dissatisfaction that it entails and unhappiness. The expectations are unrealistic. And also from the point of view of the government it's very expensive! Very expensive.

Q: I spoke at FSI for years on the Foreign Service spouse in historical perspective, and then Terry Williams called me and said, You know, the spouses aren't coming in any more. They want to do everything online. They're working. Their husband comes to Washington for his orientation and they go from here to post and want everything to come over the WEB or the Internet. And I thought, What an opportunity for misunderstanding on the part of these women! And some of them must get to some of these Russian posts, not Russian, but former...

BEECROFT: Yes, newly independent states.

Q: ...and wonder, What has happened to me? Because if they haven't had language...I think the language is most important.

BEECROFT: Oh, I think it's very important. The basic, elementary kitchen...

Q: For a spouse. Language to go out and buy a loaf of bread!

BEECROFT: And that is still something that the AAFSW has on its advocacy agenda.

Q: I don't go to the Forum because, being so far removed, it doesn't really affect me, and they don't need history: They're looking ahead. But I was amazed to see that the agenda at the last one looked exactly like the one probably in 1976 when they were setting up FLO! [laughter]

BEECROFT: It's spooky. Because I am one of the co-chairs of this thing.

Q: Yes, and you must be... [laughter]

BEECROFT: Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose!

Q: Yes!

BEECROFT: The only thing, I think, that has changed was the interest in elder care. There was a distinct interest in that. (End of tape)

Q: The Forum. I was going to ask you has any strategy - it must be deja vu for you - have any strategies developed over the years that have taken us a few steps ahead?

BEECROFT: Well, I'll tell you. This is sort of emerging again because for a long while, obviously when the Forum was working on getting the FLO started and even before that they worked on the overseas briefing center and, of course, the Forum was involved in getting pension rights for divorced spouses of Foreign Service Officers that had been married for ten years - the Forum was very active in all of this. So there was a point where the Forum was extremely active in accomplishing all kinds of things. Of course, we were overseas a lot of the time. But I know that recently the Forum was considered to be moribund, and so I was asked to take it over and see if I could...

Q: ...breathe new life into it.

BEECROFT: Well, not exactly new, I guess, but...

Q: ...to breathe something into it.

BEECROFT: Yes. In a sense you have to play with the deck of cards you're dealt, That deck of cards at this point is that people have very little time, that many people are working, that, again, as we have said before, many of the younger generation and in it only for a short time and so they're not interested in improving the institution. In fact, sometimes they would seem to be less interested in things which affect them (for example, child care facilities at FSI or at NFATC, the National Foreign Affairs Training Center) than those of us who no longer have a young child. But, in any case, what I devised was what I hope will be a way that we can do most of our work right there during the Forum. We've had two sessions so far. The first...I asked a number of people to come to tell a little about what's going on currently. Some people came from the FLO: There is a person who is in employee relations who does what it now called "family friendly issues" and who has been involved with the day care center at Columbia Plaza. She came to tell what they had been doing. And then we brain stormed - nothing right, nothing wrong, everything - brain stormed issues which where the AAFSW could conceivably take a stand. Then we threw those all up on flip charts - we had, maybe, about thirty of them. We prioritized those. Then we went through to see who would be interested in specific issues. One of the things was, again, child care; it was language training; it was elder care. Many of the same old suspects, if you will, other than elder care which has emerged as a more recent concern. I asked people then to take these groups where they indicated they would then be interested and go home and write - either do it by phone, by fax, by whatever they wanted to do - to write a one-page position paper for each issue. Gerre Lee Craig, the president, and I are hoping to present these papers to the Undersecretary for Management as an indication of AAFSW concerns.

The second session, everybody came back and we used this a session to edit these papers and to talk about the papers that we'd written, and what I've got to do today and tomorrow is to write up that three-hour session so I can see where we are. We were talking in terms, for example, of trying to convene a small conference on elder care, just to get all of the people in the Department who are interested in it together because you have DACOR; you have the Senior Living Foundation from AFSA; you have the Employee Service Center, which is sort of the mental health wing of MED; you have the AAFSW. There are a number of people around who are interested in this and who have some knowledge. So I think we may be convening a small conference on that, or maybe it'll just be another session of the Forum.

Q: However it comes out.

BEECROFT: Yes, however it comes out. I'm not quite sure yet. So to answer your original question we are in mid-stream on developing an advocacy agenda, and this is all what I think makes the AAFSW so valuable.

I quite frequently have gone to the Foreign Service Institute to talk with the A-100 class, with the junior officers, to talk to the specialists, to talk to the Overseas Briefing Center sessions; and also, just most recently, I talked with the CLO trainees on what is the AAFSW doing. But what I always stress - what makes it such an interesting advocacy mechanism - is that it's outside the Department, and that it can march right up to the Hill and lobby, which I don't believe we have used enough lately. At all!

Q: I think not since 1970...

BEECROFT: No! Not since forever! That we can march ourselves right up on the Hill! We don't have to check it with the Department or anything like that. And also, of course, this can be of enormous help to the FLO if they ever want to use us that way. Because I remember when I was in the FLO, we used to sometimes say to the AAFSW, Well, look, we can't say this, but you can! [laughter]

Q: I remember that!

BEECROFT: Would you please go do it?

Q: And so your FLO office - and Kendall has been very good about keeping in touch with AAFSW - should know that that resource is there!

BEECROFT: So that is sort of where the Forum is now, and moving very slowly. But as I said a little while ago, you have to play with the hand you're dealt and you just cannot push this thing any faster or you lose people totally.

Q: Yes. When I interviewed Janet, which was several years ago now, probably four or five years ago, she felt that FLO is getting more and more buried down in the bureaucracy and she said, "Really, we'll probably come to the point one day where we'll just have to abandon the FLO and start all over again like we did in the 1970s."

BEECROFT: There was one recent battle on that. Originally, the FLO was put in way under the undersecretary for management, which was just about as high as it could go, and that was then Ben Reed. And it is true that somewhere along the line - we were overseas - they wanted to really push it down into the mid-level bureaucracy - and that was one time that the AAFSW testified. I think they turned Leslie Dorman loose! [laughter] She is a very powerful personality.

Q: Yes, she is. [laughter]

BEECROFT: Leslie's position was, No! Don't push it down, or any time the FLO wants to do something it's going to take until the turn of the century. So, don't do that! And I think Marilyn, at the same time, went...I'm not just sure who it was, but she went to the Director General and said, Look, if you're thinking about this, I'm going to turn the AAFSW loose on you and go right to the Hill! And so it is now right under the Director General, which isn't bad.

Q: Which isn't bad.

BEECROFT: No. Not at all. I always used to say that the FLO was in the bureaucracy, but that it should never be of the bureaucracy.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: And people who understand English understand that this is a very important distinction. Other people will say, Oh, that's just semantics; but if you understand English, it is really not semantics. It's essential to the whole being of the FLO.

Q: I believe in the 70s Leslie really was in favor of not having the FLO office in the Department, if I remember correctly. That she thought it would be much better if it were out somewhere.

BEECROFT: Funny, I don't remember that, which is not to say it's wrong.

Q: Well, I think maybe she was going a little bit too far to the edge on that. I think it belongs in the Department.

BEECROFT: I think it absolutely has to be in the Department.

Q: Or I may be mistaken. Maybe she did not want an AAFSW office in the Department.

BEECROFT: That is correct.

Q: Maybe it was that. Probably it as that.

BEECROFT: No, I think the FLO very definitely has to be there because you have to know the people in the building and you have to know how to get things done and you have to know how to build consensus. Oh, no, it has to be there.

Q: I wanted to just ask you a few things about your own career, which it has been. You never thought of becoming a tandem? You didn't want to do that? Because you would have been a natural!

BEECROFT: You know, this is funny. I did think about it, but at the same time I saw some of the gyrations which tandem couples went through with young children and the horrendous stress that they placed on the kids. And I happen to be fairly high strung myself, and I use my brains to control the situation, but I just didn't think it was going to be very good for our kids, well, just even, maybe, for me, ultimately. And it's true that there has always been sort of a tension in me about that. Yes, I think I could have been an officer and I probably would have been a good one. But I just didn't like to see what it meant to the kids. Some people manage very well. But I didn't.

Q: I think also, in addition, it depends upon your mate, too. Is he going to be going to... He takes the good position once; you take the good position. Instead of moving like this, you move a little bit more laterally, more slowly.

BEECROFT: No, I'm sure that if I'd really wanted to, Bob would have supported me in this because he's always been very supportive of everything I've done. I guess he's kind of proud of it, too! But...

Q: I'm sure he is!

BEECROFT: That was really my basic concern, that I just didn't want to do this to my kids. And I think...Because, you know, the Foreign Service can be rough on them, and when you think of leaving kids, finding caretakers for kids, particularly in emerging countries where people may be very kind, but...They can give the children love and keep them out of harm's way, but as we all know, there's more to it than that. And I just couldn't see doing it.

Q: Yes. And then, what are you doing now? In transportation did you say?

BEECROFT: Yes, this is a wonderful job, and in a way, it's a FLO job, if you will, type job. The head of transportation asked me to sort of come in and see what I could figure out could be done to make it function better for people. And I was given carte blanche, which is lovely.

Q: Lovely! Yes.

BEECROFT: The chief of Transportation is a civil servant, a lovely man, really a genuinely decent, kind man, who has no hang-ups, but who understands the Foreign Service. There's no adversarial kind of business there at all. I will never be able to tell people how to write better contracts or things like that. I didn't come in for technical reasons. But I have always felt that people very often move badly and really make it very difficult for the Department or for moving men to do their jobs! And so, one of the things I have been doing - that phase is kind of over now, in a way - is I went...There are moving counselors within transportation, about ten of them, who deal with people going to different areas. They're divided up geographically; they're also divided up into incoming and outgoing, you know. And I said to them - I don't think anybody had ever asked them this - What do people do that drives you crazy? What makes it really very hard for you to do your job? And I did the same thing with the insurance adjudicator and the same with some moving men, too. And the answers came spilling out. I must admit that none of this was a particular surprise to me because they were all things that I had believed. But now my suspicions have been validated at least.

Q: What are some of the examples?

BEECROFT: For example - and a lot of this is common sense - please start as early as you can to plan your move and particularly Europe in the summer, because the amount of territory which Europe covers goes all the way to Outer Mongolia. I mean, it's across the world, if you will! And they just get in a horrendous crunch! So, (a), start early. (b) Please, if you can possibly help it, don't change the dates, because some people...Oh, that's better, that's better, that's better, that's better. They don't plan at all. And, of course, every time the date is switched, there are changes. Are the pallets ready? Is there a moving crew? Are the pallets loaded? Are there inspectors? It's a game of dominoes. It's not just a change of mind. Or the general approach to moving. You've got to take moving seriously, and at some point you've got to make it your priority. Be prepared to think that moving is exhausting physically, exhausting psychically. Think of a move as an investment in your future. People who have a bad move, often of their own doing, have a difficult adjustment to post. It colors your experience. And so, things like this.

Then, I've been going out to the A-100 class, to the specialists, to the GSOs, to OBC [Overseas Briefing Center] and spreading my message. Now, these were things I always thought, but validated by having talked with people who are up to their ears in it every day. I'm about to write some articles, which will, presumably, go into the Foreign Service Journal in May, on the same topic, also stressing at the same time many other things which transportation does - the travel manager and all of that - does for people, because they've gotten much better in the past ten years, let's say. Much, much better. Or eight years, which is the time which this man, who hired me, has been there. So that's one of the things I'm doing.

Another one of the things that I'm doing...I am working to try to put together a services corridor down at that end of the building where transportation is. The thing is that everything is already down there with the exception of the personnel technicians who cut the travel orders. And because the computers are not working properly and for other reasons there are not good connections between transportation and these people who cut the orders. And they need to be close together. And I've talked to the head of the personnel technicians, who is responsible for them, and he thinks this is a fine idea. So this is another thing I'm working on: to use transportation as kind of the touchstone of a services corridor where everybody in that corridor thinks of himself as belonging to the same process because it's a little bit disjointed at this point.

For instance, the payroll office is hidden way back on another corridor. If people want advances on their pay, this is an interest-free loan that they can get; and that belongs in the corridor, too. So this is another thing I'm working on.

Q: They can have an advance on their pay?

BEECROFT: Yes. Then, it's like paying back a loan. This is literally an interest-free loan.

Q: Well, that's pretty generous.

BEECROFT: Yes. It is! It's a real good deal, if you will. Anyway, I've been working on that. I am sitting in the office of regulations which has got one of the most difficult jobs around. It is often asked to adjudicate on this business of "fly America," which is another topic, and I won't get into it. But it makes life in the Foreign Service very difficult.

Q: Tell me about it! [laughter]

BEECROFT: Okay. You know.

Q: Imagine. Recife is two thousand miles north of Rio, but we couldn't fly American, so we had to fly from the United States to Rio and fly over Recife, and there it was! [laughter] I wasn't going to be there for another six hours or so! [laughter]

BEECROFT: But in any case, there I sit. But I realized that also when I first came into that office, simply because it was an empty desk, that - and this is an office where the public comes all the time - there were piles of papers all over the place, piles of papers. The group of men who are in there now are fairly new, and so if I started railing and raving about this it was not...

Q: It wasn't their fault.

BEECROFT: It wasn't their fault; it really wasn't. And so we have been working really to get the office into shape. We've had to reorganize the files and to just get things into some kind of order. We're getting new furniture. First of all, the material is better organized and so public-service-wise it's a better place to come. So that's another thing I've been involved in.

Q: To ease the transition from post to post.

BEECROFT: Right. And then last, but not least, I'm involved in something which is, as you may know, part of the administrative wing and is in a huge reorganization. It is really very tough on many people because many of them don't know: a) will they have a job, b) will it be of the same rank, and c) where they'll be put? And I am on something called the Outreach Communications Team, which is theoretically charged with keeping people informed as to what's going on in all the meetings; and I'm serving as the secretary for this group. I keep records and papers because somebody's got to do it and I do it fairly effortlessly. So that's another thing that I'm working on; that's what I'm doing in transportation.

Q: Oh, that's interesting, and very worthwhile.

BEECROFT: Yes, exactly.

Q: And very needed. Very needed.

BEECROFT: As long as I am doing things with the AAFSW and sometimes with FLO, I feel much happier being in the building because then I know what's going on as much as anybody knows what's going on! [laughter]

Q: As much as anybody does! [laughter]

BEECROFT: But one more thing. We talked briefly about children.

Q: Okay, that's next, but let me just finish, if I may. Is this job contract?

BEECROFT: This has been a temporary sort of thing, and I've been doing things in four-month segments. So it's not...And on technicalities, because I could not get a regular embassy job in Amman, I came back without what is called "status." And so, because I don't have status, I can't stay in this job. The funny thing is that if I can find another job from this, this, the job that I now have, is the equivalent of giving me status. I can't stay in this job, but I could go to another one. And transportation has got one that they want to put me in. So I may come out of this...

Q: So this would give you your Civil Service...?

BEECROFT: Ranking. Yes.

Q: At a what?

BEECROFT: At a 12.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: The salary is about $54,000 a year, and that's - given my spastic career...

Q: That's a very handsome...Now, so you might change jobs in transportation.

BEECROFT: I'll stay there.

Q: Stay there to get the status. Then, you say your husband, we know, has seven more years in the Service and maybe more. Would you maybe be willing to go abroad again? And what happens to that status? Once you have it you don't lose it, do you?

BEECROFT: No.

Q: Isn't there a certain point that you cannot stay away from a job?

BEECROFT: This is true. This is true. And to be perfectly honest, any... I will be sixty-two in June; so probably by the time I'm sixty-five I'm going to think of not...I mean, I don't know that I can even work past that date. So I haven't given too much... I'm just sort of doing what I want to do and haven't been thinking too much at this point about what I'll do maybe ten years down the road because then I will be doing something different.

As for going overseas again, I'm not ready to do it yet.

Q: How long have you been back?

BEECROFT: We have been back...I have been back for a year and a half, but that was because my husband was in Bosnia for a year. And his next job looks like it's very definitely is going to keep us in Washington for maybe three years. And whether we're going to go out again, or not, I'm just not sure. I would not be ready to go out now. I never dreamed that I would ever say that.

Our kids are here. We're together for the first time - I mean, they're not living at home - but we see them all the time, and we're together for the first time in eighteen or nineteen years.

Q: That would be hard to give up. That's the reason we're in Washington: because our daughter's here. Our son is in California, but his job in Hewlett Packard brought him east when Guido retired, so we saw him a bit more. And then, we go to California every year, every other year. But that becomes a factor.

BEECROFT: Truly! It does. And I think the kids think in terms of making up for lost time, too, even though they loved the Foreign Service. In a way I think they want us to go out again because they want to have some other interesting place to visit.

Q: [laughter] To come and visit! All right. Now we've segued into children. So you really have no long-term personal ambitions that you're looking at beyond your husband's retirement like some women do. You're going to retire with him and find something new to do?

BEECROFT: I am much more interested in having something which I really consider to be worthwhile and interesting and if I am paid that it's reasonable, but I don't have huge personal ambitions, if you will. I guess that's maybe what's made it all work.

Q: Well, I think it definitely has made it all work. Have you had a small private income to help that along?

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: Yes. I can tell when I interview people. [laughter] But I have to ask!

BEECROFT: You know, I have thought about this. It's not humongous.

Q: It doesn't have to be.

BEECROFT: But there was always something that we could tap into.

Q: That makes all the difference in the world.

BEECROFT: I mean, it's not the kind of thing you ever talk about, of course. You just don't talk about it. But, you know, it is very nice. And the sense of security. This business. Just irreplaceable.

Q: No. It makes a difference. That's why I think that people who don't have that extra security - and there are a lot of them today that don't...

BEECROFT: Most!

Q: Most. Maybe we are drawing on a different type of person into the Foreign Service. If the spouses that I saw when I was speaking at the OBC [?] were any indication, they weren't the type of people who brought a little personal income into the Service with them.

BEECROFT: And, you know, to get back to the little bit of personal income. It's much easier...We usually didn't tap into it. We tried very hard not to.

Q: Well, maybe to buy your house.

BEECROFT: Yes, yes. For example. And there's a huge "for example."

Q: Yes. [laughter]

BEECROFT: The down payment! It was there. This is a tremendous advantage. But then when you know there is something there to help you, then it's much easier to really scrimp because you know it's there. But if you have to scrimp, you really have to because there's nothing there, that is tougher.

Q: I mean, when you mentioned a while ago borrowing on your salary, I mean I just couldn't fathom doing that!

BEECROFT: No, no.

Q: I mean, I absolutely couldn't fathom. We couldn't fathom borrowing money to send our children to school. I was full of admiration for people who were doing it. But if you have to do it, I guess you have to do it.

BEECROFT: I was just thinking with college expenses with our son we paid everything up. With our daughter we took a bit of an equity loan on our house just because we didn't want to get into other... We wanted to leave other things sit where they were. So that was not a move of real desperation. It was kind of a [stop gap].

Q: Actually, we've never bought a car on time. But we bought a car when we bought the house, and then it was less expensive to take out a loan on the car than it was to take out a loan to work on the house because, there again, that's something that Guido wanted to take from capital. And so we found that our car loan...What we did was we borrowed on the car what we wanted to put into the house. We did it that way at a teeny, tiny little percentage.

BEECROFT: So it does make a difference.

Q: It makes a big difference. So we're segueing now into children.

BEECROFT: Yes, we're going to come back...In fact, in the original report on the concerns of Foreign Service families and spouses, I had my own two pages in that report, and it was entitled - I was just looking at it the other day - "Finances and Foreign Service Families." Which was simply to highlight how fiendishly difficult it was for some people to, for many people to make ends meet when the junior Foreign Service Officer, at that point, was getting less than a Washington bus driver!

Q: Oh, really?

BEECROFT: But anyway, at that point they were just starting to do some studies on Civil Service/Foreign Service pay comparability and level of difficulty in jobs and so forth. And it certainly has gotten better, but as prices have gone up and college and these other things we've been talking about, it's...No, it's been a tremendous advantage to quietly have that [reserve].

Q: I have...I suppose it's still at the Foreign Service Institute. I did a demographic chart on the people that we interviewed, the 170 women that we interviewed; and I had a little blue sticker if you came into the Service in the 30s and orange if you came in in the 40s and red in the 50s. And those little stickers, the little blue stickers from the 20s and 30s cluster around Sheridan Circle, Dupont Circle; and they march out to Georgetown and Chevy Chase. Whereas today, there are actually - and this was, you know, metropolitan Washington - today there are Foreign Service people who are off the map.

BEECROFT: They're all in Virginia!

Q: All this way. And I point that out as one of the things that have happened to the close feeling that the Foreign Service people used to have for one another: How close do you living in Herndon feel to someone living in Wheaton?

BEECROFT: No, not very.

Q: And that's one of the things that have happened to the Foreign Service as far as this being a homogeneous group. My example is, in the 1940s and 50s a lot of Foreign Service people bought houses in Georgetown. And those women have grown gracefully older together, many of them of the ones that I interviewed. Many have died. Some have died. A number have moved to Collington. A number have moved to retirement centers to be nearer their children. But when I was interviewing them, and this was in the mid 80s, twelve years ago, they had a very nice supportive working group in Georgetown, and it worked. Some of them had lost their husbands. They took taxis together. They went to the Kennedy Center together. That is not going to exist for the people who live in these far-flung suburbs.

BEECROFT: No. It's very splintered.

Q: Very splintered. My last time that I spoke at NFATC, one young woman had driven...They couldn't find a house anywhere that they could afford. They were here in Fredericksburg. She had driven from Fredericksburg to the Department to take her husband to work. She had gotten up at four or something like that. She had driven back to get the kids off to school. And she had driven up to Arlington to hear me talk. And I thought, What kind of a Foreign Service is this?

BEECROFT: That's a hardship.

Q: That's a hardship!BEECROFT: No, this is true that I know that the distances which people commute now... The men with whom I work are coming from practically Richmond!

Q: And they drive. They have to drive.

BEECROFT: Or they car pool. But they spend an awful lot of time on the road.

Q: And so they must be stressed when they get to work. They must be doubly stressed when they get home! [laughter] Are we acknowledging spouse abuse in the Foreign Service now? Child abuse? I mean, is FLO acknowledging?

BEECROFT: I'm sure that Ginny...I mean, we don't talk about it. Not in the sense that we're hiding it, but we don't talk about it in the sense that this is a very confidential thing.

Well, yes, I would say yes, we are talking about it because maybe eight or nine years ago the DCM as an institution was appointed as the family officer at post, and it was up to him to deal with things like that. So, in this sense, yes.

Q: Was it often brought to the CLO and the CLO took it to him or would people actually sometimes come to your husband with their...?

BEECROFT: Sometimes to the CLO, yes. I really don't know whether anybody ever came to him. There was one very strange case where a man was afraid of being attacked by his wife. [laughter] This was a very extraordinary case.

Q: Yes. Maybe not.

BEECROFT: Maybe it's not. But I mean there were other things that I won't go into details, of course, which made it very unusual. But no, I don't think. No, I don't think there's any effort not to admit it, but I do know that a couple of days ago, maybe two weeks ago, or recently, let us say, that the director of the FLO was briefing Strobe Talbott, the deputy secretary of State, and a number of under secretaries and very senior people. And she volunteered the information that within the last day or two the support officer in the FLO had just gotten five new divorce cases. And she said you could just hear them all say, Oh! Us?

Q: Oh! Still? One of the first women I interviewed was one of the women in transition and then became one of the displaced Foreign Service partners. She said when she went in to talk about divorcing her husband in the 40s or 50s they said, divorce a Foreign Service officer? There must be something wrong with you! So there is some of that mentality still?

BEECROFT: Apparently there is.

Q: Your husband, as family representative, what did he tell that man? Cut it out? Theoretically, when someone came in and said, My husband is abusing me, was it then his [your husband's] job to approach the Officer and say a) do you need a transfer? What's the stress? Or b) we don't do this in the Foreign Service. What's your side of the story? How does he handle something like that?

BEECROFT: He and the regional security officer had to go into this together and place some sort of restraining orders, practically.

Q: Do you remove the man from post?

BEECROFT: Yes, subsequently. Well, they both were removed because he was about to retire. And I think the wife really was deeply disturbed. And he, I think I would describe him as a Mr. Milquetoast. And they were removed from post.

Q: Well, at least there's a mechanism for dealing with that.

BEECROFT: Yes, there is a mechanism with teeth in it, if you will.

Q: Yes. Because we were at post with a couple who feuded constantly, physically, to such an extent that the neighbors were constantly bringing in the local police to deal with it, while he, at the same time, was having an affair with the DCM's secretary. [laughter] I mean, I've never seen anything like it, and there didn't seem to be anything in place. We had a political ambassador. There was the DCM. The DCM obviously had no direct responsibility for this situation and either closed his eyes or pretended it didn't exist.

BEECROFT: Well, in the early days, I was actually the FLO's first divorce counselor. I mean, people were afraid to get near anything that had to do with it because they were afraid of lawsuits and all other kinds of things. I remember when we got overseas, I mean, I dealt with a number of divorce cases when I got to Bonn. People had been lying in wait for me. Again, it was very, very difficult. The post would not take any stand on it at all. One was a military spouse and I could go through the Judge Advocate's, the JAG, representative at post and work at it from that point of view.

Q: When I was CLO, a woman came in and said, I want a list of lawyers or someone in the Department - I want it now - who could help me with divorce. And I thought, Oh, dear. This is my first...I had no counseling experience, so I had absolutely no idea how to deal with this at all. So I said, All right, I'll call FLO and I'll get it for you just as soon as I can. I called with grave concern, got everything for her. She was working in the visa section at the time. I called her into my office and said, Here it is. I got it for you! And she said, Oh, same old list! laughter] And off she went! But I felt better because I thought, Well, this is nothing new. This has been going on before, so I won't have any great trauma over this. [laughter] But children, now. Children. To segue into children.

BEECROFT: Children in the Foreign Service.

Q: How many hours do you have now, Mette? [laughter] This might take a while. [laughter]

BEECROFT: What makes children fly in the Foreign Service, I guess, is the question.

Q: Or what makes them crash.

BEECROFT: Or what makes them crash. Because obviously there are concerns. You uproot them. Particularly when they're older, they lose their friends. Educationally there can be concerns with continuity of academic standards, continuity of subjects, continuity of teaching methods. There are things that you have to look out for. I think that some children are just simply more fragile than others. That's given in their little beings.

Q: Some are physically more fragile? Or mentally?

BEECROFT: Some are mentally more fragile, and you cannot get away from that. That is a given. And you have to be sensitive to this possibility and we have to look for what might be difficult for a child.

The military has come out with a number of good studies on this, one of them quite old; but I think it's still perfectly relevant, which is that the attitude of the mother is crucial, absolutely crucial.

Q: Oh, I would think so.

BEECROFT: I mean this is kind of common sense.

Q: I was just going to say that that should be so obvious!

BEECROFT: And I certainly would think of it that way, but this has been validated by studies, too. I always had a good time. I worked very hard often, but I had a good time. It was a positive thing. So, our kids - and the kids get their own credit, too - it's not just because I like the Foreign Service that it's been a good thing for them. I think they are really citizens of the world in the best sense. This is not jet-setters or anything like that, but their horizons are wide. In fact, they're often annoyed by their peers who they find have terribly narrow horizons and they aren't interested in the international news or they aren't interested in the news at all; and our kids are both, you know, glued to this kind of thing.

I think that they both learned to appreciate their worldly possessions through some of the posts where we lived, both Egypt and West Africa, where there was terrible poverty. For instance, in Cairo we used to layer our garbage, arrange it, so that the things which we knew that the Copts, who were the traditional - the zabaken, who were the traditional garbage collectors in Cairo - so that we would arrange things so that they could pull the stuff that would be useful to them from the top of the garbage so that they didn't have to go plowing through all of it. We got to know what they were looking for: They were looking for old bottles and aluminum foil and things like this. So I think [the children] really got to appreciate what they have, previous experience. Learned a lot.

And I always used to encourage them when they started to look for jobs to look carefully at their Foreign Service experience and play on it. And particularly Pamela, I was able to steer her, when she came to Ouaga, into two very interesting volunteer jobs, one of which was Save the Children, where she used her French to good avail and got into - she was only fifteen then - political discussions and economic based discussions with the other, older women who were there. Then she also did some work with USIA, serving as an intern in the English-teaching classes, though as it turned out, they left her alone with the English classes. But this is a very bright kid, a real presence. So she was able to turn that kind of experience into very good things later on. And our son got himself an internship at the North Atlantic Assembly, which is a think tank for NATO. Because of his writing skills, and language, too, he had a very interesting experience there. So I think they've been able to turn this Foreign Service experience into some positive things.

Q: Were they always with you, or did they go to boarding school.

BEECROFT: Well, yes and no. In Bonn, for example, when Pamela was just a little mouse, Christopher was in a British school. And then he outgrew the British school and the only other school there was the DOD [Department of Defense] school. And many people, including DOD officers, didn't think it was worth a dime. So, at that point he went off to Taft. He did one year at Taft while we were in Bonn. Then we got to Cairo, where there was an excellent school, the Cairo Community College, so-called, college, in the French sense, but secondary school. But he did not go there because he wanted to continue in Taft. Continuity was an issue. He would spend two years in Cairo. Okay. Then was he to be pulled out of that to go to yet a third school? So he stayed at Taft for the two years we were in Cairo, and then when we came back to the United States, spent the last year while we were in the U. S. in boarding school. It was helpful to have some resources because then we were paying for boarding school ourselves, whereas previously it was partially paid.

And then, Pamela was with us in Cairo, with us in Bonn when she was in nursery school really. And then with us in Cairo. Then she, too, went to Taft while we went off to Burkina Faso. There was no school other than through eighth grade, and she was beyond that. And then she went off to boarding school. She really wanted to.

Q: Our children, too, spent most of their growing up in boarding school; and I think, if anything, it makes your family bond closer.

How do you explain, maybe in your CLO years, how do you explain the fact...You know, as you say, children are different. One child in the family will absolutely blossom in the Foreign Service and another will absolutely crack. And you think that's just the difference of makeup?

BEECROFT: I think it is just the difference. Yes. Or it could...

Q: It could be circumstances.

BEECROFT: I was just going to say. It could be circumstances.

Q: It has to be a little bit of both.

BEECROFT: Yes. It could be that one child at one post just happens to come into a school which is not good. This happens. You don't want it to happen, but sometimes it does.

Q: It happened to Cammillo. We let them go one year to the DOD school in Kenitra, outside of Rabat. Cammillo hated it! He absolutely hated it. Ruthie loved it because she was making popovers and sewing shifts. So they went to Tangier after that, which was three hours away.

BEECROFT: Maybe the underlying thing in all of this is that I think a Foreign Service family has to pay much more attention to their children's education than sort of the average family. Any family who cares about education has to pay attention. But I think you have to pay even more attention when you're in the Foreign Service.

Q: Because it could become such a disjointed... You know, two years here, two years there. It could be a terribly disjointed experience.

BEECROFT: It could. I think parents have to take more interest in schools. In many places you don't have a school unless the parents take a good interest in it. And I think also, something that we did with both of our kids was to take them to the Kingsbury Center, not because there were any problems, but for just a general evaluation so we knew better what we were dealing with.

Q: Now you'll have to tell me what the Kingsbury Center is.

BEECROFT: The Kingsbury Center is...Actually, it is... (End of tape)

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(second interview)

Q: We're recording Interview II with Mette Beecroft and it is Wednesday, March 25. And Mette has come back to talk about some of the complications resulting from distance that are inherent in Foreign Service life. Let me just mention them, that Foreign Service families have some of the same difficulties that...well, the problems are increased by distance - divorce, schools, the continuity and quality of education, employment, elderly parents. So I think I won't ask questions; I will let you talk about what you wanted to bring up this morning. And if I have questions as we go along. I'll insert them if you don't mind.

BEECROFT: No, not at all. No, I very much appreciate the opportunity to come back and try to finish off our interview a little because when thinking about what I said in the first session, it was all terribly, terribly positive.

I appreciate the opportunity to come back and make a few more comments because in thinking over what I said the first time, I realize that it was just about one hundred percent positive. And granted I feel very, very positive about our Foreign Service experience. However, I thought that in the interest of a certain amount of balance and maybe some reality that it would be useful to mention some of the things which also can be difficult. I think particularly, if anybody ever happens to use any of these tapes as a source of what is life like in the Foreign Service, it is also only fair to try to point out some of the difficulties.

As you mentioned, many of the difficulties that the Foreign Service family or Foreign Service people experience are not really any different from the difficulties that other people living in the United States or military families or whatever would experience because everybody will have concerns about education and employment and caring for older parents and all of these sorts of things. However, I think what makes it so much more complicated is often the distance. How do you do these things when you are in Ulan Bator in Outer Mongolia? And we have people there. So this is when it really does get complicated.

What I'd like to do is just go through a number of topics that came to me in a rather unstructured and informal way and make some comments. I'll start with education because that's something that's of great interest to anyone. It can be very difficult to maintain continuity of subjects for your kids when they get older, continuity of quality, continuity of the methods of teaching even as you move around from school to school. And I think in general we can say that a Foreign Service family has to take more interest in their child's education than most people do. I mean, everybody needs to, but it becomes even more important when you're moving around the way we do. The question of schooling the child who has special educational needs is particularly difficult. I think that we understand much, much more now about what the children who have special needs, what they really need; but it's not always sure that you can get this kind of support overseas because the United States is really very, very well developed in the kinds of courses and classes that it provides for kids who need special education.

Another problem with that is that sometimes you have a school that's got a wonderful setup, and then in two years the whole thing has changed because one or two of the teachers have left to go on to another post themselves. So you have to do a lot of scouting out for children with special educational needs. And also, for kids who are categorized as gifted and talented. If you want to challenge those kids sometimes you have to do a lot extra yourself because the facilities are not always available.

I think that it's apt to get harder as children get older because just emotionally they become more anchored in their communities and secondly, when they're thinking towards college and taking the SATs and all of this, their courses become more and more important. And obviously you very much hope that you're not going to have to move a child senior year of high school. It can be done, but it's not usually a good thing. Even junior year is not a good time to do it. Sometimes the only option is boarding school, and boarding school can be very, very successful. Both of our children did go to boarding school, and I think it was basically a good idea. But believe me, when you put your thirteen-year-old on a plane from West Africa, knowing that that child is going to have to spend a night in a hotel in Paris and then go on, it's kind of scary. So there are these kinds of concerns. Also, even though the boarding school is good, the getting there can be difficult. Sometimes planes, when you're in West Africa, for example, the planes...I mean, they're not going! Not flying. I can remember calling the school and saying, I'm sorry, but our daughter will be two and a half days late because there are no planes flying. So you get all these kinds of funny things.

But anyway, just a sort of cautionary word here and there.

Another topic that is near and dear to our hearts is employment for spouses, and particularly, I think, as employment has become more and more of an economic necessity. It takes on a very, very important dimension overseas, too. The State Department, I believe, has done an enormous amount to - not guarantee, and I stress that, not guarantee - but to facilitate employment. The FMA, the Family Member Appointments, is a big step forward. But I think that people have to realize that if they are the trailing spouse, as the Brits say, that if someone is looking for a regular career path, the Foreign Service may not be the place where you belong because I think it is usually very, very difficult to develop that. Some people are able to do it, but it's very hard to do.

Q: Let me just interject. Have you been reading the series in The Post, on the front pages of The Post, on women?

BEECROFT: I have put it all...I have read some of it. I have put it aside. I have six hours of a train trip this weekend.

Q: Well, it makes you realize what a problem the Foreign Service has. These young MBA graduates...Now, admittedly, they took them from Harvard and Stanford and Wharton. They were making two hundred and forty-five thousand dollars a year, and one of them got tired very early on; and one of them got tired very early on of the pressures of corporate life. By that time she had amassed several million and went into business for herself. Now how could you ask a woman to go overseas in the Foreign Service as a spouse to be underemployed - say, if, theoretically, she had a background like that? There's no answer.

BEECROFT: There is no answer.

Q: The only answer is to make her an officer and have them go as a tandem couple.

BEECROFT: Yes, if she really wants to.

Q: If she really wants a career.

BEECROFT: I think that the Foreign Service, I was about to say, is almost doomed to have this built-in tension between overeducated women - and it usually is women, let's face it, not always, but mostly is - and not challenging enough jobs available.

Q: And I think the State Department at this point realizes. You know, for a while after the '72 directive we were looking fosolutions for this, and I think they realize now that the solutions are not there. They can just facilitate.

BEECROFT: They can only facilitate. No. Absolutely. I agree with you.

Q: And anyone who comes up with the answer to this...[laughter]

BEECROFT: If you are lucky enough to find something which you find very rewarding and where you can use your skills, then that's pretty good. And in a sense, I feel that I've done that because I have taken a lot of my Ph.D. skills and used them on the quality of life issues and writing and reading and advocacy. I mean, writing and research and editing and all of this kind of thing. And I have found it extremely rewarding. But it certainly has not been a usual career in that sense, and sometimes it's been very frustrating. Sometimes I've been prevented from doing things because my husband was a senior officer and all these good things. So it is not easy. I think that the most important thing is for the Board of Examiners and the people who recruit to make sure that people really understand this.

Q: But do they? Are they permitted to mention the spouse when they're recruiting these days?

BEECROFT: They are. There was one time long ago...

Q: ...when they couldn't.

BEECROFT: Well, they could. But I actually went from the FLO over to see [the Board of Examiners] and more or less said, you know, You have got to start telling people the realities. And their answer...None of these people are left now. But their answer was, Oh, but we might scare some people away! [laughter]

Q: Absolutely! Oh, absolutely. [laughter] I still think that if you have, what, ten thousand people applying for a hundred positions, some of those must have spouses that are willing to go along. How much does it take to train a junior officer? How many tens of thousands? Or whatever? And then have them leave in a couple of years because their spouse can't use her architectural degree or her bar degree or whatever? There have to be some...I wish we could come up with some word other than "traditional" spouse. But there must be some who are willing to go along for the ride, which I was in my day because you had no option.

BEECROFT: That's right. That's right.

Q: Which made it easier.

BEECROFT: And we come back to this great irony of if an ambassador is not married, he can hire a housekeeper for, what, forty-five, fifty thousand dollars a year; but if he comes with a spouse, that spouse is expected to do it for free!

Q: I mean, I can't believe that that mentality is still persisting.

BEECROFT: And it's still there. And I really wish, maybe just on a pilot basis, that we could find some way of trying to really remunerate spouses who are willing to do the representational, all of the traditional things. And I don't even mind using that word "traditional." So be it. That's what it is.

Q: That's what it is. A "spouse spouse".

BEECROFT: A spouse spouse. But in any case, I wish we could at least do a pilot program on that to see if we could at least alleviate some of the financial need because that's one of the big things.

Q: What we need is someone who's knowledgeable, like you, whose husband is appointed ambassador, but realizes that his career is perhaps over after that appointment and go to the mat for... And it has to be done. And Christine Shurtleff tried to do it, but she wasn't willing to go to the mat for Len's career.

BEECROFT: No.

Q: And this is a problem. And so it has to be someone who has - well, very few people have your experience and knowledge about how things function...

BEECROFT: How to do them. Yes.

Q: ...and making them work. But it has to be someone like that who relies on someone like you for advice because I'm not sure they're always going to get it from FLO and AAFSW because there are still too many women there who still put their husbands' careers in the forefront before they take any action. And you can't fault them. Those are the realities.

BEECROFT: So I think it may be just that the Foreign Service is just doomed, if that's the word. It may be a little bit grim.

Q: Grim.

BEECROFT: But it needs to resign itself to the fact that there's always going to be this built-in tension where the job situation is never... No one is ever going to sit back and say, "Ah, the job situation is perfect now." Never going to happen.

Q: Because I think there's going to be more and more pressure as more and more women expect to work. Most of them do now, I think.

BEECROFT: Yes, but the numbers are going up.

Q: But it'll no longer be a privilege to work in the Foreign Service. They'll come in expecting to have...

BEECROFT: Yes, I am afraid you're right.

Q: That will only be a bigger problem.

BEECROFT: And it's only going to be a bigger problem. Fortunately, [or] unfortunately, Foreign Service Officers are generally a very intelligent group. They marry...

Q: ...intelligent women.

BEECROFT: ...intelligent women. [laughter]

Q: Hopefully.

BEECROFT: And many of them do!

Q: Maybe they shouldn't. [laughter]

BEECROFT: Then you get back to the business of marrying traditional, foreign-born spouses. There's a very large number of them.

Q: Yes, oh, yes.

BEECROFT: And there's got to be a reason!

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: And, of course, obviously, simply the fact that they spend most of their time overseas, so that it's perfectly logical that someone who is, in general terms, hoping to get married will find somebody at some other post.

Q: Right. And sometimes they go right from graduate school to the Foreign Service. For the first time they have a real salary, and they meet a very upper class - I will say for lack of any other word - woman who is a huge asset to them in Peru or Thailand or wherever, who transported halfway around the world to another culture can become a liability instead of an asset.

BEECROFT: This is also true. This is also true.

Q: Do they face up to that at the FLO?

BEECROFT: Yes. This I have not discussed with anybody, but simply the fact that some foreign-born spouses when they come to the United States for the first time sometimes, they are supposed to feel "at home." This is going to be their new country, if you will. And this is very, very difficult for many of them. And the AAFSW does have a group of foreign-born spouses who, in a way, cling to each other for support. I mean, you can understand. It's very...

Q: There's a tape in this collection that Sheila Switzer did over a decade ago after she had been the foreign-born spouse organizer and leader, talking about the reaction of some of these women when they got here. They had no support system, whereas abroad - and I don't mean liability; that's too strong a word. It's difficult. It would be very difficult for me to go to Bulgaria...

BEECROFT: Yes. Exactly!

Q: ...married to a Swiss and represent Switzerland!

BEECROFT: Exactly! [laughter]

Q: That's the point I'm trying to make.

BEECROFT: Yes. I understand that. If you stop to think about it, that is not an easy thing to do. A very uncomfortable thing to do.

Q: Of course! Of course!

BEECROFT: And there I can think of some people in Amman, for example, who were, they were not American and they were not Jordanian. And so here they were trying to fit into an American embassy as an insider and still there they were in Jordan and trying to cope with that scene. I mean, this is not easy!

Q: No, it isn't. My most vivid experience with this was the wife of the consul general in Rotterdam, who was Dutch. And this was a big thing for her. She came back to Rotterdam as the wife of the American consul general. Her father had not been a Nazi sympathizer or he would have been run out of the country. But he did some financial dealings during the War; he profited during the War.

BEECROFT: As many did.

Q: Yes, yes.

BEECROFT: Quietly, but...

Q: And how and what the German connection was I don't know. But that poor woman was not accepted in Rotterdam society. She was not accepted. And one time after a bridge party my neighbor said to me, Well, the only woman here today who didn't belong here was the consul general's wife! Well, the woman ended up...And her husband was impossible, too. He used her for his... He used her to promote his position in the Foreign Service. That's the only way I can [interpret it]. Well, she ended up with a nervous breakdown, almost a nervous breakdown, and having just to go off to Morocco by herself. But they never did accept her. There was nothing she could do. She could be as gracious; she could dress as well as she liked; her English was impeccable. But here was her husband's big moment in the Foreign Service.

BEECROFT: Oh, no. It can definitely have its complications.

Q: And it was no fault of the woman!

BEECROFT: Absolutely not. She gets caught in difficult circumstances and there is nothing that...

Q: And I guess what started this conversation was that the marrying of the traditional wife, which so often today is a foreign-born spouse, leads to other complications.

BEECROFT: Yes, down the road.

Q: Down the road the complications are there.

BEECROFT: That's just another aspect of the spouse situation. Absolutely. Totally different topic.

Q: Yes.

BEECROFT: Well, health considerations.

Q: Oh, yes.

BEECROFT: Again, obviously there are many parts of the world where you can go and health care is excellent. You have no problems whatsoever. However, a very large percent of the Foreign Service people end up in places which are less than ideal from the point of view of health. For instance, I think of when we were in West Africa, generally we managed to stay quite well, but when you just consider the things, such as if somebody really needs medicine of one or another sort, to make sure that you get it when there is no APO and there is certainly no international mail that's going to be functioning, and it's so hot that you can't do it anyway, you couldn't send medicine. So you have to think ahead all the time about medicine that you might need.

Some situations, or some conditions, are truly just plain unhealthy. For instance, in Ouagadougou, there was so much pink dust around that our white cat turned pink! But this also got into people's lungs so that there were many people who had lung conditions and just generally were unhealthy. A lot of sinus, bad sinus problems from all of the dust.

Q: Yes, Sahara dust.

BEECROFT: Sahara dust, pink, fine, incredibly fine Sahara dust. I'm not particularly a compulsive housekeeper, but we used to dust two times a day because there was just so much pink dust all around. So this was just not good for people's internal workings.

You wonder about the effect of the medicine that you have to take against malaria, for example, what effect it has on you. And I know in the beginning when I started to take the chloroquine, it gave me horrible headaches. And little by little I got used to it, but you need to take the stuff, but it wasn't particularly pleasant. Regular checkups. This is also hard to...I mean, there is nowhere where you can go to have your teeth cleaned or anything simple like this. And particularly if you're one of these people who needs their teeth cleaned every three months rather than every six months, you have a real problem. You also wonder very much about what would happen if you really were taken sick because the only way you have out is through the SOS plane. If the SOS plane is in Abidjan, fairly close by, then that's pretty good. But if it's in Geneva, where it resides, then you also have a problem.

So that there are things like this that you have to put up with. And certainly often another thing that people wonder about is if, you know, what if there is an accident. We had a "walking" blood bank at the embassy, so we all knew what blood types we were and who had the same type. But the blood supply...I mean, this is AIDS territory. And so you have to be very, very careful. And I mean, there was no hospital. I once did have to go to the hospital because I whacked my head pretty hard. And there was one French doctor who was an expert with x-rays and he had very, very good equipment. But the walk I took through that hospital to get to that x-ray room was just... I mean, there were people lying in the corridors and just anything nasty you can imagine, it was there. So there are some places where you have real, real health concerns which everybody seems to manage to roll with, but nevertheless it's not always perfect.

Q: That's because they're young and healthy when they go out.

BEECROFT: Yes. You have to be; you really need to be strong, physically strong in many places to have all of this work well.

Q: Today we're sending people who are overweight, under exercised, still smoking. That would have an effect I would think.

BEECROFT: As I remember we were all lean and healthy. [laughter]

Q: Yes, absolutely, in Sierra Leone.

BEECROFT: As our society fattens up, because that looks like what we're doing, it could not have a good effect.

Q: No, I would not like to do that again. I would not like to go to Freetown, Sierra Leone, for three years tomorrow.

BEECROFT: No. And I don't think, as much as we enjoyed working in Ouagadougou, I don't think I'd like to go back right now. Maybe this is old age setting in or something, but I'm glad I did it.

Q: [laughter] But you've done it! We've done our bit. It's time for others. [laughter]

BEECROFT: For others to do it. And also the question of health, if you are medevaced out somewhere, that's a very stressful thing. I mean, if you have go back to the United States, for example, or somewhere else for surgery and you're alone? I mean, this kind of thing...Usually the embassy does its best where you're going. Say, if you're going to London, they do their best to give you some contact and some support, but it can be very lonely. Or if you have to go on a medical evacuation and you have to take a young child with you because you can't leave a young child behind, further complications.

Q: And when Guido was medevaced from Trinidad, which was very close by, I had to pay my own way.

BEECROFT: Just one last comment on the medical business. For instance, in Ouagadougou it looked at one point as though somebody might need to go out and we'd need an escort. And at a small post, for example, how will you find an escort? Who can go? And so I actually stood by as available because at that point our kids, well, one was in college and one was in boarding school; so I could leave. But this is just another one of these things.

Q: Guido had an escort, the nurse. I wasn't qualified in any way. She was sitting there with a hypodermic of something - I forget what it was - because the pressure changes when you take off and this was a heart thing and they didn't know what was going on. Fortunately, it was nothing. It was just stress, undue stress. But she was sitting there with the hypodermic in case something happened, and I wasn't qualified to do that. But once we got to Miami he went for a long walk on the beach and Irene and I went shopping because she had to go back the next day, and everything was fine. It was just getting him out of a very, very stressful situation.

BEECROFT: Well, that in itself was a helpful thing to do, just to get a change of pace.

Q: Yes. Right.

BEECROFT: Another not totally related subject, not physical health, but mental health, which is...

Q: ...maybe even more of a problem than physical health.

BEECROFT: Equal, at least. I think that generally just from the point of view of the spouse, this having to start over again at every post...

Q: Oh, reinventing yourself.

BEECROFT: You try to reinvent yourself every time.

Q: Every two or three years.

BEECROFT: And you certainly can look at reinventing yourself every time as a challenge and a positive thing, but it sometimes...

Q: [laughter] To a point.

BEECROFT: But I mean you come to a new post and you may have done all kinds of good things, or people had told you you'd done good things. And of course you can't go around with a little piece of paper saying, See here. This is what I've done! But sometimes you just really feel like shouting, I am somebody! I've done something! But you arrive as an absolute tabula rasa.

Q: Now I'm surprised to hear you say that because I thought that your name, along with Janet's, because of the FLO experience, you had wide, wide...A high profile.

BEECROFT: No, this is true.

Q: I'm surprised.

BEECROFT: Well, no. I am luckier than most.

Q: I would think so.

BEECROFT: There have always been people around who knew what I did. This is true. But nevertheless, sometimes you get people...

Q: ...a distance from you.

BEECROFT: Yes, I mean this is getting to be twenty years now since the FLO opened. Many people did know what Janet and I had done. Well, for one thing, earlier, some people at post studiously look down on the CLO and the FLO. We're getting farther and farther away from that now. It wasn't always the case. Or people who are just so uninformed that they don't know anything. They just assume that what the CLOs and the FLO do was always their right and it's always been there. So, yes, I, too, have had that feeling but perhaps maybe less than some because I've always been able to say quietly to myself, I have...There is really something that I can say I did contribute.

Q: This little inner building-up. [laughter]

BEECROFT: That's right. But be that as it may, I think that there are lots of hidden stresses, if you will. Of course, I think of a place like Ouagadougou where all of the normal stresses that we feel are magnified by the question of distance.

Q: Isolation, too.

BEECROFT: And isolation. Absolutely. Many people are familiar with this, and I don't have a copy right now in front of me, a table of the different types of stresses that anybody - you've probably seen it - that anybody experiences. And the most stress is about one hundred points for the death of a spouse. And then all of the other things like a change in job, change in school, change in a whole lot of things - this is all tabulated. And the instructions at the bottom of it are if you get over, oh, about one hundred and fifty points - these figures are not correct, but this is the principle - about one hundred and fifty points that it would not be unusual to experience some sort of psychosomatic illness or something.

Q: And a move, if I remember, is way up there. Maybe not right under the death of a spouse, but it's way up there.

BEECROFT: It's way up there. If you put together all of the stresses which a Foreign Service family feels, or an individual experiences, it puts you way off the chart! I mean, we all should be walking basket cases given the amount of stress that we have in our lives. And I just thought that this was kind of interesting because we have far more than the average amount of stress.

But be that as it may, I think the hidden stresses are sometimes the ones which are more, in a sense, more difficult to deal with for the simple reason that nobody talks about them. But they are there.

Q: And which are they?

BEECROFT: And this again would be, say, in a post like West Africa, where we were. Is there going to be a coup? The African countries are...Well, we all know that there have been lots and lots of coups in Africa. There had been a coup just a year before we came and the whole time we were there there were rumbles. And so, you know, we often had extra money in the house, and I went as far as...

Q: Suitcases packed.

BEECROFT: Not quite that far. But I went as far as making a list of what I would want to take out because I knew that I would not think very well if the moment was there. And so it was always there. I can remember once coming out of a house and three planes were flying very, very low, and headed towards the presidential palace. My first reaction was, My goodness! They're going to bomb it! Well, as it turned out, it was some unannounced maneuvers to celebrate Armed Forces Day and they were practicing.

Q: [laughter] But they didn't bother to tell anyone!BEECROFT: We didn't know. We didn't know. So this was my first thing. So you wonder about coups and with a coup, of course, goes an evacuation. In Amman, for example, the spouse can be in a dangerous situation. In Amman, Bob, my husband, when he was Deputy Chief of Mission, had an armored car and his driver was his bodyguard and was armed at all times. We were under surveillance from the Iraqis who lived right across the street. So sort of uncomfortable things like this.

In Sarajevo, he had four bodyguards and flak jackets, and these bodyguards slept in the house with him even.

So these are stresses. You don't go around and talk about them all the time, but they are there. I think in Amman, still to this day, you always drive in and out of garages very quickly because this is one of the few points where if anybody's out to get you, they know exactly, you know, coming in and out of your residence is a pretty obvious place to find you.

Q: There's no alternate route.

BEECROFT: No, there isn't. And so you get this kind of stress. In a place like Ouaga - you mention the stress of the isolation - that is certainly there. And it's funny: What some people find as stress, other people find pleasant, which is that there is nothing to do. Some people like this and use their inner resources, and I think we talked a little about this last time. So this is another kind of stress.

And just the stress of a small community, where it is apt to be...You have to learn how to both be supportive, but to give each other space because you are so on top of each other, as it were. And you turn to each other in a way, but at the same time...So it can be kind of a love-hate relationship, if you will. You turn to people for support, but nevertheless, you need some space.

There are lots, lots of stresses. Another stress comes from simply staying in touch with children, with older parents, with absentee landlords. I mean, it doesn't have to be an emotional thing; it can be business, staying in touch, too.

Q: Yes. Everyone and everything that you've left behind that you still have some sort of responsibility, loyalty to.

BEECROFT: Yes. Or simply even the financial responsibility of bills. And again, I come to West Africa, but it could be many other places, too, where there is no international mail which functions, where there is no pouch - I mean, no APO - and where you can count that a round-trip thing with a pouch will take at least four weeks. So lots of nasty things can happen to bills in that amount of time. So you kind of have to think ahead.

Not to mention things like - and we've all done this - bringing in supplies for holidays and trying to get Christmas gifts in July and Thanksgiving turkeys for embassy parties or decorations, not the food itself, but decorations, to try to get them whenever you're here in the summer. On various occasions I have asked the Paper Store to turn itself inside out, to go and dig in its boxes. I've explained what I was doing. But it's just one of these crazy things that you have to figure out.

Q: Well, you have to be aware that it exists. In Brazil, for instance, the Christmas paper was awful.

BEECROFT: Awful.

Q: And I wasn't prepared for that.

BEECROFT: And normally you prepare to send them looking like that.

Q: [laughter] Right. Right.

BEECROFT: No, see, you'd have to think ahead and plan ahead, and sometimes take - I was about to say emergency action at some point. We got a notice from our storage company that our goods were going to be sold at auction.

Q: [laugher]

BEECROFT: [laughter] We were in Cairo. We were in Cairo. And, boy, did I get on the phone fast! And it was something with the mail!

Q: That actually did happen to a couple who had a house here on S Street. They didn't sell them at auction, but the storage company went out of business.

BEECROFT: Oh, I know what you're talking about, I believe. Yes.

Q: And you would have been in FLO at the time because it had to be in '78 or '79, and they didn't know what had happened to their...

BEECROFT: Fidelity was one of the companies that did go out of business. It was a horrible mess. A horrible, horrible mess.

Q: That sounds like it. And nobody could find their belongings as they were trying to move into their house.

BEECROFT: They'd sold some of them. Fidelity sold some of them. Oh, no. The father died, and the son who took over was not made of the same cloth at all, either his business acumen or his general way of doing business, what constituted honorable business. And it was a terrible mess and it was very, very hard on a number of people.

But, no. These things have happened. Now, fortunately, I think transportation has - and I can say this because I work there now - much, much more of a handle on this kind of thing now. But it was not very good.

Q: And, of course, the other thing that State has no control over is when there's an accident and your whole household goes down at sea.

BEECROFT: Yes. This doesn't happen too much any more.

Q: I suppose a lot goes by air these days?

BEECROFT: Well, no, a lot of it goes by sea. No, I mean you could lose a whole container over the side or something like that.

Q: But I'm sure that doesn't happen as often.

BEECROFT: No, that doesn't happen very often. So there are those kinds of things. There are sometimes little conditions that are kind of funny.

Q: [laughter] Putting it mildly!

BEECROFT: Putting it mildly. As you know only too well you have to boil your water and filter it and all of this kind of thing where the electricity is variable, at best.

Q: Vegetables have to be soaked.

BEECROFT: Vegetables have to be soaked in Clorox or whatever happens to be around. Food preparation takes a lot of time and sometimes you have to do... This is one of the good reasons to have help in the house, that if you had to go four or five different places to get something, to find something, then somebody who really knows the ins and outs of the markets knows where to find things.

Sometimes the electricity business can be really dangerous. One of our houses just about burned out underneath us because they had old circuit breakers.

Q: We had a fire, too, in a linen closet in Brazil.

BEECROFT: Yes. It can be very, very serious.

Q: Instead of using a light bulb, the handy man had run little wires through the closets that generate just enough heat to keep the mildew out, and one of those shorted out.

BEECROFT: Oh, my goodness.

Q: Fortunately, the closet was closed, so there wasn't enough oxygen for it to burn, but it smoldered for I don't know how long before I smelled something burning. I asked the cook, What's going on in the kitchen? Nothing, Seï¿½ora. Well, something's burning. And they found smoke in the guest room.

BEECROFT: See, you have all of these kinds of things and you learn to...In some parts of the world, all kinds of creepy crawlies, which you simply cannot avoid. Some people really don't like them. Personally, I got used to large geckos and industrial-size cockroaches and all of that. You know, they were there.

Q: No, that doesn't bother me. But I never quite got used to the vipers and the cobras in Sierra Leone. [laughter]

BEECROFT: That's a little different.

Another thing that is sometimes fairly complicated is simply logistics of the move. I think many people don't really understand what it takes to get organized. Each item in your house has maybe ten possible ways to be considered. If you take, for example...If you are sending one to college, to boarding school, the luggage you take with you, your air freight, your household goods, storage, what you might be leaving in an attic, what you are throwing away, what you're giving away, and what you sell. There are ten things right there. So you have to count on giving it good time because a move is kind of an investment in your future, and if you don't move well, you're apt to prejudice the way in which you view the post to which you're going.

Q: I would think so. And I would also think that there are some people who never learn to move well.

BEECROFT: This is one of the things I've been trying to do now. In fact, I've got an article coming out in the Journal on just this. You know, "it's your move," which is the name of the booklet that transportation has put together. It's good, I think. There is a lot that transportation is responsible for, but people have got to be responsible for something also.

Just two other brief, random points. With bringing up children overseas. The whole question of children overseas and bringing them up overseas and things that you really have to watch out for. The caretakers. Sometimes you may find out if you don't watch out that the caretaker's way of caring for children is not really what you would like. For example, in some places, any child who is unhappy or cries or whatever is just given loads of candy and bribes and things. There are all sorts of examples. But anyway, the main thing that you really do have to watch out for is that you keep a close eye, watch on what your caretaker's values are and how well they speak English.

And also I think that overseas when you're apt to have a lot of help that you have to be very careful, in general, to make sure your kids still do what they're supposed to do and that you make sure that they still pick up things and that they just don't assume that, oh, so-and-so can pick it up. And the other thing is that they learn to treat the people who work in your house with respect and not any kind of condescension or bad manners towards them. Because this does not form them well for life in the United States.

Q: Right. For reality.

BEECROFT: For reality. And I think even for grown-ups. You may have a driver and three people working in the house, but it's useful to remember that when you get back, you could be mowing the lawn or taking out your own trash. Enjoy it while you have it, but this is a little bit of never-never land.

One other comment. People are often apt to think that household help is, oh, how lovely to have it. But I think you have to remember, too, that household help overseas is a responsibility.

Q: Absolutely.

BEECROFT: And you become the mother and the father and the confessor, and sometimes you may even be asked to bail them out of jail or intervene in family disputes or things...

Q: All of the above. Yes.

BEECROFT: ...that you never imagined were going to happen. One of the people who worked in our house in Burkina left his last child in our generator room - or, the mother did - to dramatize the fact that the father was not supporting her well enough. And so we had to intervene there. But just sort of a cautionary note: It is not always clear sailing.

Q: Let me go back to the children and servants, too. I think there's a fine line there. I agree with you entirely; they have to realize that that is never-never land. But at the same time, I think you have to be careful because I have seen parents abroad who, in a way, belittle their children because they made them do the work that the servant really should have done. I think there's a fine line there. I used to say to them, Now, you must keep your room picked up because when they come in to clean, they can't clean. And that's all I ask you to do. Well, my son didn't want to do that. He wanted to keep his books that he read that summer next to his bed. I said, Fine. So then we'll vacuum around them, but no one's going to pick those books up. Those are yours. In a way, it was sort of interesting because at the end of the summer he had read one hundred and ten books. Quite an accomplishment!

BEECROFT: I'll say!

Q: Now I don't know what they all were. I don't remember. That was that long ago. But we had the ability to buy the pocketbooks at the base. And, you know, it wasn't junk, but he may have read Dick Francis and he may have read John MacDonald and people like that. But Guido reads those, too, as recreational reading. But that was a fine line: Not to make the children do the servants' work, but to make it possible for the servants' to do their own work.

BEECROFT: That this is a cooperative effort. You keep your room in order and they will help you with the cleaning.

Q: That's right. That's right.

BEECROFT: It can work perfectly well.

Q: And I wonder if there's any emphasis put on this in training at FSI. Is there?

BEECROFT: I have always said it every time I get a chance to. In Cairo, for example, there was something called the Community Service Center which was a mental health organization. And we used to do all kinds of orientation things for newcomers, many of whom were going to be able to live in a way which they had never, ever thought of before. And these words of caution I always gave them because I think it's very important because you can breed little monsters otherwise.

Q: Yes, you really can. And then, getting back to your next point that I think so many of our contemporaries at home who are not Foreign Service think, Oh, seven people to do the housework! Nine people passing through your kitchen in a day! What a nightmare really when you come right down to it. [laughter] Most of the time it works, but when it doesn't...Like you said, the child in the...

BEECROFT: ...generator shack.

Q: I had a wife come in one day who hadn't eaten for three days because her husband hadn't come home - he was our maitre d' - because he had another family. If that didn't take some sorting! I had to call the cops and bring somebody over who had a much better grasp of Portuguese because mine was only so...I knew what was going on, but I felt the nuances in dealing with a situation like that had to come from the woman who was best at that, who happened to be the budget and fiscal officer. So she came rushing over to help us out.

BEECROFT: Then again, when one of the people who worked in the house - I think he must have been on something - but New Year's Eve he was celebrating with a stick of dynamite, blew part of his hand off!

Q: [laughter] Oh, no!

BEECROFT: And we had to nurse him through that. He couldn't do anything, but we continued to pay him and keep him. You never know. You never know. But it's not a free ride.

Q: No, it's not.

BEECROFT: At all.

Q: And yet, nine times out of ten, they really will pitch in when you need them and you have three hundred, five hundred people...

BEECROFT: Yes.

Q: You know, the whisky used to disappear and there was an awful lot of wine consumed, things like that. But you sort of overlooked that really as long as it didn't get out of hand.

BEECROFT: As long as it was tolerable.

Q: Tolerable. [laughter] Things creeping away, not loping away [laughter] from the storeroom and the kitchen.

But I think those were very good points to make. I'm glad you came back.

BEECROFT: Yes, to give a little bit of balance. Because there is an overwhelmingly large amount of positive things.

Q: Oh, absolutely!

BEECROFT: But I think that it's fair to bring up the things that are apt to be a bit problematic at times, too.

Q: But those have to be dealt with because if people don't go out with these - I don't want to call them expectations - but these realities of what might happen, then you really do have culture shock.

BEECROFT: Yes. And, you know, I'm not a mental health professional at all, but I do know that there is something called anticipatory guidance, and this simply refers to giving people realistic expectations so that when they come up against them they are easier to deal with. This anticipatory guidance is kind of like an inoculation, and it makes whatever hits you... Either it doesn't happen or it makes it much milder. And I think that's important.

Q: When did you go to Ouagadougou?

BEECROFT: We were in Ouagadougou from '88 to '91.

Q: Just fairly recently.

BEECROFT: Yes, fairly recently.

Q: We went to Freetown in 1962. We were the second group out after its independence. There was no post report. No one had come back. The first group was waiting for Guido to get there. And the day after we arrived, the DCM and the political officer left.

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BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Spouse: Robert Mason BeecroftSpouse's Position: Political officer; POL/MIL; DCM; Special envoy for Bosnia

Spouse entered Service: 1971Left Service: Active DutyYou entered Service:SameLeft Service: Same

Status:Spouse of FSO

Place/date of birth: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - June 19, 1936

Maiden name: Ottesen

Schools:

Germantown Friends, Philadelphia

Wellesley, BA

Middlebury, Vermont, MA

University of Pennsylvania, Ph.D.

Date/place of marriage: October 22, 1966 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Children:

Pamela Ording, 1975

Christopher Cameron, 1968

Profession:

French professor

Community Liaison Officer

Honors:Department of State Superior Honor Award; Department of Army special commendation for outstanding support/exceptional performance; various certificates from posts, most recently Amman for volunteer involvement and accomplishment

End of interview